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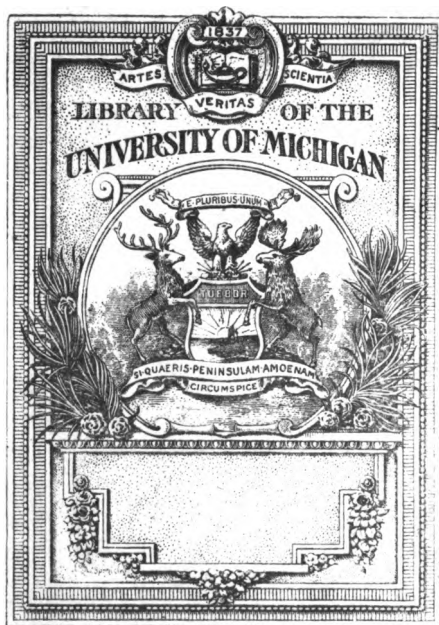
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JOSHUA BY GEORG EBERS.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

JOSHUA.

A STORY OF BIBLICAL LIFE.

BY

GEORG EBERS,

AUTHOR OF "AN EGYPTIAN PRINCESS," "UARDA," ETC.

FROM THE GERMAN BY

CLARA AND MARGARET BELL.

IN TWO VOLUMES.—VOL. II.

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J O S H U A.

CHAPTER I.

AT a long hour's distance beyond the little temple where the prisoners had rested, the road leading southwards to Succoth and Baal Zephon parted from that which led in a south-easterly direction across the fortified frontier-line to the isthmus and the mines.

Not long after the departure of the prisoners, the army gathered together to pursue the Hebrews had set forth from the city of Rameses; and as the criminals had rested some considerable time by the well, the troops had nearly overtaken them. Thus they had not gone much further when some pioneers rode up to clear the highway for the approaching host. They ordered the gang of prisoners to stand aside, and proceed no farther till the swift baggage

train containing Pharaoh's tents and household gear should have passed them; and, indeed, the king's chariot-wheels could already be heard.

The drivers were well content to be bidden to wait; they were in no hurry, the day was hot, and if they were late in reaching their journey's end it was the fault of the army. To Joshua, too, the incident was agreeable, for his young companion in chains had been staring before him as if in delirium, and had answered his questions vaguely or not at all, so that the older man was growing uneasy; he knew full well how many of those condemned to forced labour fell into madness or melancholy. And now a portion of the host would march past them, and the sight was new to the lad, and might rouse him from his dull moodiness. There was by the roadside a sand-hill overgrown by tamarisk bushes, and to this the driver led his file of men. He was stern, but not cruel, so he allowed his "moles" to stretch themselves on the sand, for the march past would be a long business. They had scarcely settled themselves when the roll of wheels, the neighing of fiery steeds, and shouts of command were heard; with now and then the harsh bray of an ass.

As the foremost chariots approached, Ephraim enquired whether Pharaoh were now coming; but

Joshua informed him with a smile that when the King led forth his troops to battle, first of all, immediately after the advanced guard, the King's camp and furniture were sent on; for that Pharaoh and his nobles liked to find their tents pitched and the tables spread when the day's march was over, and all, officers and men alike, were to rest for the night.

Hosea had not ceased speaking when a number of empty carts and asses free of burthens came past; they were to carry the tribute of bread and meal, beasts and birds, wine and beer, to be paid by each village through which the sovereign should pass. This had been levied by the collectors the day before. Soon after came a company of warriors in chariots. Each small, two-wheeled chariot, plated with bronze, was drawn by a pair of horses, and in each stood a man and a charioteer. Large quivers were attached to the breast-work of the chariots, and the soldiers rested on their spears, or on their large bows. They were protected against the missiles of the foe by shirts covered with scale-armour, or thickly padded coats of mail under gaily-coloured tunics; and by a helmet, as well as the breast-work of the chariot. These, whom Joshua designated as the vanguard, went forward at an easy pace, and

were followed by a vast multitude of waggons and carts drawn by horses, mules or oxen; and with them were whole herds of asses, with towering loads on their backs.

Next he pointed out to his nephew the tall spears and poles, and heavy rolls of rich stuffs which were to be used in erecting the King's tent, and which were a burthen for several beasts; the asses and the carts with the kitchen utensils, and the camp smithies. With these came the leeches, wardrobe keepers, salve-makers, cooks, garland-winders, attendants and slaves attached to the Royal camp, all mounted on asses driven by nimble runners. All these, having so lately set out, were still fresh and in high spirits, and those who noticed the prisoners flung many a sharp jest at them, as is the Egyptian way, though several applied a balm in the shape of an alms; others, who said nothing, sent a slave with a few fruits or some small gift, for he who was free to-day might, on the morrow, be sent after these poor wretches. The driver let this pass, and when a slave whom Joshua had sold some time since for his dishonesty, shouted aloud "Hosea," and pointed to him with a malignant gesture, the good-hearted rough fellow offered the insulted Hebrew a drink of wine out of his own flask.

Ephraim, who had fared from Succoth on foot, with a staff in his hand, and a small wallet containing dried lamb's flesh, bread, radishes and dates, expressed his amazement at the numberless men and things which one man required for his comfort, and then sank into melancholy again till his uncle roused him with some fresh explanation.

As soon as the camp baggage had gone by, the driver wanted to start with his prisoners, but the King's pioneer—the "opener of the way"—riding in front of the archers of the guard who came next, forbade it, as it ill beseemed criminals to mingle with the soldiers; so they remained on their hillock and looked at the rest of the procession.

After the archers came the heavy infantry, carrying shields of string or hide, so large as to cover the brawny bearers from their feet almost to the chin; and Hosea told the boy that at night they were placed in a circle round the King's camp, and so enclosed it, as it were, with a fence. Besides their shields they carried a javelin, and wore a short dagger-like sword or a war-sickle. When, after some thousands of these heavily armed men, there followed a troop of sling-men, Ephraim spoke for the first time of his own accord, exclaiming that such slings as the shepherds had taught him to make were far

better than those of the soldiers; and then, encouraged by his uncle, he told him, so eagerly that the men lying about him listened to his words, how he himself could slay not merely jackals, wolves and panthers, with a stone from a sling, but even a vulture on the wing. And meanwhile he asked the meaning of the standards and the names of the different companies of warriors.

Several divisions had already gone past when at last another crowd of chariots came in sight, and the driver cried aloud:—"The kind God: The Lord of both worlds: Long life to him, health and happiness!" As he spoke he fell on his knees in an attitude of adoration, and the prisoners lay prostrate on their faces, to kiss the ground, holding themselves in readiness to join at the right moment, at their gaoler's signal, in the cry, "All hail and happiness!"

But they still had long to wait before the expected monarch appeared. After the chariot-men came the royal body-guard, mercenaries of foreign nations wearing a peculiar kind of helmet and long swords. They marched on foot, and immediately behind them a vast multitude of priests and scribes appeared, with a number of images of the gods.

Then again a company of guards, and at last Pharaoh and his Court. Foremost of them all was Baie, the High Priest, in a gilt war-chariot drawn by splendid brown steeds. He had, in former days, led troops forth to battle, and had taken the lead of this pursuing army at the bidding of the gods, wearing his priest's robes indeed, but also the helmet and battle axe of a captain of the host. At last, close behind Baie's chariot, came Pharaoh himself; but he did not ride forth to battle in a war-chariot, as his bolder forefathers had done, but preferred to be borne on his throne. A magnificent canopy over his head screened him from the scorching sun, and, to the same end he was surrounded by fan-bearers, carrying immense bunches of ostrich feathers fastened at the end of long fan-sticks.

When Menephtah had fairly left the city and the Gate of Victory behind him, and the triumphant shouts of the populace had ceased to keep him awake, he had fallen asleep; and the spreading fans would have screened his face and person from the eyes of the prisoners if their cries of "Hail!" had not been so loud as to rouse him, and cause him to turn his head towards them. But the gracious wave of his hand showed that he had something else in his mind than criminals, and before the voices of

the hapless convicts had died away his eyes were closed once more.

Ephraim's dull brooding had given way to eager interest, and when the King's gilt chariot came past, empty, drawn by the most splendid horses he had ever beheld, he broke out in admiration. These noble beasts, their clever heads crowned with ostrich plumes, and their harness glittering with gold and precious stones, were indeed a sight to see. The large gold quivers studded with emeralds, at the sides of the chariot, were full of arrows. The sleeping man, whose feeble hand held the reins of government of a great nation, the languid idler who shunned every sort of effort, recovered his energies as soon as he was in the hunting field, and he looked upon this expedition as a hunt on a grand scale; and inasmuch as it seemed to him a royal sport to shoot his arrows at men instead of at brute game—at men too of whom he had but lately been in mortal dread—he had yielded to the High Priest's behest, and come with the army. The expedition had been sent forth by order of Amon, so he could now have no further cause to fear the power of Mesu. When he should catch him he would make him repent of having struck terror to the heart of Pharaoh and his Queen, and causing them to shed so many tears!

While Joshua was telling the youth from what Phœnician city the gilt chariot had been brought, he suddenly felt his wrist clutched by Ephraim, and heard him exclaim: "She—she!—look, it is she!"

The lad was crimson with blushes; nor was he mistaken, for there, in the same travelling chariot in which she had come to visit the prisoners, was Kasana; and many ladies besides formed part of the Court accompanying this expedition, which the Captain of the foot soldiers, a brave old veteran of the time of the Great Rameses, called a mere party of pleasure. When the monarch went forth across the desert to do battle in further Syria, Libya and Ethiopia, only a select party of women accompanied him, in curtained vehicles, under the conduct of eunuchs; but on this occasion, though the Queen had remained at home, Baie's wife and some other women of rank had set the example of going forth with the troops, and it had been a tempting opportunity to many to enjoy the excitement of war without running into danger.

Scarcely an hour since, Kasana had surprised her old friend, the High Priest's wife, by joining the rest; for only yesterday, nothing could persuade the young widow to go forth with the host. Yielding to a sudden impulse, without asking her father, and

with so little preparation that she had not the most necessary gear, she had overtaken the army, and it seemed as though the magnet which had drawn her was a man whom she had hitherto avoided, albeit he was no less a personage than Siptah the King's nephew.

As the cortege passed the sand-hill, the prince was standing by the fair young woman in her waiting-woman's place, and interpreting to her with many a jest the symbolism of the flowers in a nosegay, while Kasana declared it could not have been intended for her, as not more than an hour since she had had no idea of following the expedition. Siptah, however, assured her that even at sunrise the Hathors had revealed to him the happiness that was in store for him, and that the interpretation of these flowers proved it. A party of youthful courtiers, who had quitted their chariots or litters, were walking by the side of her carriage and taking part in the laughter and merry talk; the High Priest's wife also put in a word now and again, for her litter was borne close by Kasana's.

All this had not escaped Joshua; and as he saw Kasana with the prince, whom she had hitherto detested, rapping his hand with her fan with gay audacity, his brow darkened and he asked himself

whether the young widow had not been cruelly mocking him in his overthrow. But at this moment the driver of the prison gang caught sight of the curl on Siptah's temple, which he wore as a badge of the blood royal, and his loud cry of "Hail, hail!" in which the other guards and the prisoners joined, attracted the attention of Kasana and her companion. They turned to look at the tamarisk thicket whence it came, and then Joshua could see that the young woman turned pale, and with a hasty gesture pointed to the group. She must have given Siptah some behest, for the prince at first shrugged his shoulders, but, after some delay and argument, half in jest and half in earnest, he sprang from his chariot and beckoned to the driver of the gang.

"Did these people gaze on the countenance of the kind God, the Lord of both Worlds?" he asked, in a voice so loud that Kasana must have heard him from the road; and when he received a hesitating answer he went on in haughty tones:

"No matter. At any rate they have seen mine, and that of the fairest of women, and if, by reason of that, they hope for mercy they are justified. You know who I am. Those who are chained together are to be relieved of their fetters;" then signing to the head gaoler, he whispered in his ear: "But

you must keep your eyes open all the wider. That fellow close to the bush is that Hosea who was a captain in Pharaoh's army. When I am at home again, come and tell me what has become of the man. The more completely you can quiet him the deeper shall I dip into my money-bag. Do you understand?"

The man bowed low, and thought to himself: "I will take good care, my prince, and see that no one takes the life of any of my moles. The greater these lords, the stranger and more bloody are their demands. How many an one has come to me with a similar request. Siptah can release the feet of these poor wretches, but he would load my soul with a cowardly murder! But he has come to the wrong man."—"Here, you fellows, bring the bag of tools this way, and strike the chains off these men's ankles."

Pharaoh's host moved on, and meanwhile the grinding of files was heard on the hillock, the prisoners were freed from their fetters, and then for security their arms were tied.

Kasana had desired Prince Siptah to have the poor creatures who were being led away to misery, relieved at any rate of their heavy foot chains; and

she frankly confessed that it was intolerable to her to see an officer, who had so often been a guest in her own house, so terribly humiliated. The High Priest's wife had seconded her wish, and the prince had been forced to yield. Joshua knew full well to whom he and Ephraim owed this respite, and received it with thankful gladness. Walking was made easier to him, but anxiety weighed him down more heavily than ever.

The army which had marched past would suffice to annihilate a foe ten times as great as the Hebrew force, to the very last man. His nation, and with them his father and Miriam, seemed doomed to a cruel death; Miriam, who had wounded him so deeply, but to whom he owed it that even in prison he had discerned the path which he saw was the only right one. However powerful the God might be whose greatness the prophetess had so fervently extolled—to whom, indeed, he himself had learned to look up with fervent adoration—the sweeping onslaught of this vast host must inevitably and utterly destroy a troop of unarmed and inexperienced herdsmen. This certainty, which each fresh division as it passed by made more sure, sank deep into his soul. Never in his life had he experienced such

anguish, and that pain was intensified as he beheld his own men—all well-known faces who had so lately obeyed his word—under the orders of another. And it was to slaughter his own kith and kin that they were now marching to the field. This was a great grief; and Ephraim's state likewise gave him cause for fresh anxiety, for since Kasana's appearance and her intercession for him and his companion in misfortune, he had relapsed into silence and gazed with wandering eyes either at the rear of the army or into vacancy. Ephraim now was freed of his irons, and Joshua asked the lad in an undertone whether he did not feel a longing to return to his people and to help them to resist so mighty an armament, but Ephraim only replied: "In the face of such a foe they have no choice; they must surrender. What indeed did we lack before our departing from Zoan? You were a Hebrew as they were, and yet you rose to be a mighty captain among the Egyptians until you obeyed Miriam's call. I should have acted differently in your place."

"What would you have done?" asked Joshua.

"What?" replied the boy, and the fiery young soul blazed up in him. "What? I would have remained where honour and fame were to be found, and everything that is good. You might have been

the greatest of the great, the happiest of the happy! I know it for certain, and you chose otherwise!"

"Because duty required it," said Joshua, gravely; "because I never more will serve anyone but the people of whose blood I am."

"The people!" said the boy, contemptuously. "I know the people, and you too have seen them at Succoth. The poor are abject creatures who cringe under the lash; the rich prize their beasts above everything on earth, and those who belong to the heads of tribes are always quarrelling among themselves. Not one of them knows what is pleasing to the eye and heart. I am one of the richest of the nation, and yet I shudder to remember my father's house which I have inherited, though it is one of the largest and best. Those who have seen anything finer cease to care for that."

At this the veins swelled in Joshua's brow, and he wrathfully reproved the lad who could deny his own race, and fall away like a traitor to his own tribe.

But the driver commanded silence, for Joshua had raised his admonishing voice, and the defiant lad was well-pleased to obey. As they went on their way, whenever his uncle looked reproachfully in his face, or asked him whether he had thought

better of it, he sulkily turned his back and remained gloomily silent, till the first star had risen, and the prisoners having encamped on the waste for the night, their meagre fare was dealt out to them.

Joshua dug out a bed in the sand with his hands, and kindly and skilfully helped his nephew to do the same. Ephraim accepted his service in silence; but presently, as they lay side by side, and Joshua began to speak to the boy of the God of his fathers in whose help they must put their trust if they were not to perish of despair in the mines, Ephraim interrupted him, saying in a low voice but with a fierce decisiveness:

"They shall never get me to the mines alive! Sooner will I perish in the attempt to escape than die in such misery!" Joshua whispered a word of warning in his ear, and reminded him again of his duty to his people. But Ephraim only begged to be left to rest in peace.

Soon after, however, he lightly touched his uncle, and asked in a low voice:

"What are they going to do with Prince Siptah?"

"I know not, nothing good, that is certain."

"And where is Aarsu, the Syrian, the commander of the Asiatic mercenaries, your enemy who watches

us with such malignant zeal? I did not see him with the rest."

"He remains in Tanis with his troops."

"To guard the palace?"

"Just so."

"Then he is Captain over many, and Pharaoh trusts him?"

"Entirely, though he hardly deserves it."

"And he is a Syrian, and so also of our blood?"

"At least he is nearer to us than the Egyptians, as you may know by his speech and his features."

"I should have taken him for a Hebrew, and yet, you say, he is one of the highest men in the army."

"And other Syrians and Libyans are Captains of large troops of mercenaries; and Ben Mazana, the herald, one of the greatest men about the Court, whom the Egyptians have named 'Rameses in the Sanctuary of Ra,' is the son of a Hebrew father."

"And he and the others are not looked down upon by reason of their birth?"

"It would scarcely be true to say so much as that. But what is the aim of all your questions?"

"I could not sleep."

"And such thoughts as these came into your

head? Nay, you have something definite in your mind, and if I guess it rightly I am sorry. You wish to enter Pharaoh's service."

After this there was a long silence between the two; then Ephraim spoke again, and although he addressed Joshua, he spoke rather as if to himself:

"They will destroy all our nation, and those who escape will fall into slavery and disgrace. By this time my house is doomed to destruction, not a head of my great herds will be left to me, and the gold and silver I have inherited, and which is said to be a great sum, they will carry away with them; for it is in your father's keeping, and must fall a booty into the hands of the Egyptians. And shall I, now that I am free, go back to my people, and make bricks? Shall I bow my back to be flogged and ill-treated?"

Here Joshua exclaimed in an eager whisper:

"Call rather on the God of our fathers to protect and deliver His people; and if the Most high hath determined on the destruction of our nation, then be a man, and learn to hate with all the might of your young soul those who have trodden them under foot. Flee to the Syrians; and offer them

the strength of your young arm; give yourself no rest till you have taken revenge on those who have shed the blood of the Israelites, and cast you innocent into bondage."

Then again there was silence, and nothing was to be heard from where Ephraim lay but low moans from an oppressed heart. At length, however, Joshua heard him murmur:

"We are no longer weighed down by chains, and could I hate her who procured our release?"

"Be grateful to Kasana, but hate her people," he whispered in reply. And he heard the lad turn over in his trough, and again he sighed and groaned.

It was past midnight; the growing moon stood high in the sky, and Joshua, still sleepless, did not cease to listen to his young companion; but Ephraim spoke not. Still, sleep shunned him likewise, for Joshua heard him grinding his teeth—or was it that some mice had wandered out to this parched spot covered with dry brown grass, between salt plains on one side and bare sands on the other, and were gnawing the prisoners' hard bread? This grinding and gnawing must disturb the sleep even of those who most desire it, and Joshua on the contrary wished

to keep awake that he might open the eyes of his blinded nephew. But he waited in vain for any sign of life on Ephraim's part.

At last he was about to lay his hand on the boy's shoulder, but he paused as he saw in the moonlight that Ephraim was holding up his arm, although before he lay down his wrists had been tied more tightly than before. Joshua now understood that the noise which had puzzled him was the gnawing of the lad's sharp teeth as he worked at the knot of the cords; so he sat up and looked first at the sky and then round about him. He held his breath as he watched the young fellow, and his heart throbbed painfully—Ephraim meant to escape; he had even achieved the first step towards freedom. He hoped that good fortune might follow him, but dreaded lest the fugitive might set forth in the wrong direction. This boy was the only child of his sister, a fatherless and motherless orphan, so he had never had the advantage of those numberless lessons and hints which only a mother can give, and which a proud young spirit will take from none else. Strangers' hands had trained the young tree, and it had grown straight enough; but a mother's love would have graced it with carefully selected grafts. He had not grown up on his

parents' hearth, and that alone is the right home for the young. What wonder, then, that he felt a stranger among his own people?

At such thoughts as these great pity came upon Joshua, and with it a consciousness of being deeply guilty in regard to this gifted youth who had fallen into captivity for his sake when bearing a message to him. Still, strongly as he felt prompted to warn him yet once more against treachery and faithlessness, he would not do so for fear of imperilling his enterprise. The least sound might attract the attention of the men on watch, and he was now as much interested in his attempt for liberty as though Ephraim were making it by his instigation. So instead of tormenting him with useless admonitions he kept his eyes and ears open; his knowledge of life had taught him that good advice is oftener neglected than followed, and that personal experience is the only infallible master.

Very soon his practised eye discerned the path by which Ephraim might escape if only fortune favoured him. He gently spoke his name, and then his nephew softly replied: "Uncle, I can untie the cord if you put out your hands; mine are free."

At this Joshua's anxious face grew brighter. This bold-spirited youth was a good fellow at heart;

he was ready to risk his own success for the sake of an older man who, if he escaped with him, might only too probably hinder him in the path which, in his youthful illusion, he hoped might lead him to fortune.

CHAPTER II.

JOSHUA looked cautiously about him. The sky was still clear, though, if this north wind should hold, the clouds which seemed to be coming up from the sea, would soon overcast it.

The air was sultry, but the men on watch kept their eyes open and relieved each other at regular intervals. Their vigilance would be hard to evade; but close to the trough which formed Ephraim's bed, and which his uncle, for their greater comfort, had dug by the side of his own on the gentle slope of a mound, a narrow rift widened to a ravine, its edge gleaming in the moonlight with veins of white gypsum and sparkling ores. If the supple lad could but slip unseen into this hollow, and creep along it as far as the shores of yonder salt-lake, overgrown with tall mares-tail and a thicket of desert shrubs, under cover of the gathering clouds he might succeed in his attempt.

Having come to this conclusion, Joshua next considered as calmly as though he were deciding on

a route for his troops, whether, if he had the use of his hands, he might be able to follow Ephraim without imperilling the boy's escape. But to this he could only find a negative; for one of the watch was close at hand, sitting or standing on a higher point of the hillock, and in the bright moonlight he could not fail to see every movement if the lad untied his bonds. Moreover the clouds might perhaps have covered the moon before this was accomplished, and then Ephraim might let slip the one favourable moment which promised him release, and be led into danger on his account. He was this boy's natural protector, and would it not be base indeed to bar his way to freedom for the sake of a doubtful prospect of escape for himself?

So he whispered to Ephraim:—

“I cannot go with you. Glide along the rift to the right, down to the Salt Lake. I will keep an eye on the guards. As soon as the clouds hide the moon and I cough, creep away. If you succeed fly to your people. Greet my old father from me, assure him of my love and truth, and tell him whither I am being taken. Listen to his and Miriam's counsel; it will be good. Now the clouds are gathering about the moon—not another word.”

Ephraim persisted in imploring him, in the

softest whisper, to put forth his hands, but he only bid him be silent; and as soon as the moon was shrouded, and the watch who was pacing to and fro just above them had begun a conversation with the man who came to relieve him, Joshua coughed gently, and then listened in the darkness with a throbbing heart and bated breath.

First he heard a slight rustle, and by the flare of the fire on the top of the slope, which the drivers now mended to keep off wild beasts, he saw that Ephraim's bed was deserted.

At this he breathed more easily, for the ravine must by this time hide the boy, and when he listened more sharply than before to catch a sound of creeping or slipping, he could hear nothing but the guards talking and their heavy footsteps.

Their voices reached his ear, but not the words they spoke, so eagerly was he bent on following the youth in his flight. How agile and how cautious the fugitive must be in his movements! He must still be in the ravine. The moon seemed to be struggling with the clouds, till for a moment the silver disk victoriously rent the heavy black curtain which hid it from the eyes of men, and the long bright shaft of light was mirrored in the motionless

waters of the Salt Lake; Joshua could see everything that lay below him, but he detected nothing which bore any resemblance to a human figure.

Had the lad met with some obstacle in the dell? Was he checked by a cliff or a gulf in its gloomy depths? or—and at this thought his heart seemed to stand still—had the abyss swallowed him up as he felt his way in the darkness? Now he longed to hear a sound—the very faintest, from the depths of the ravine. This stillness was fearful!

Ah! sooner silence than this! A clatter of falling stones and slipping earth came up, too loud now, through the still night. The moon too again peeped out from its veil of clouds, and Hosea saw, down by the pool, a living form which seemed that of a beast rather than of a man, for it went along on all fours. And now the water splashed up in glittering drops. The creature, whatever it was, had plunged into the lake. And again the clouds hid the moon and all was dark. Hosea breathed more freely, saying to himself that it was Ephraim whom he had seen, and that the fugitive, come what might, had gained a good start on his pursuers.

But the men were not sleeping nor deceived; for, although he cried out, in order to mislead them, “A Jackal”! a shrill whistle rang out, awaking

all the sleepers. In a moment the driver of the gang was standing over him, a burning torch in his hand, and he heaved a sigh of relief when he saw this prisoner safe. It was not for nothing that he had tied him with double cords, for he would have been made to pay for it dearly if this man had escaped him.

But, while the driver was feeling the rope that bound the Hebrew's wrists, the flare of the torch he held fell on the fugitive's empty resting place. The cords he had bitten through lay there yet, as if in mockery. The driver picked them up, cast them at Hosea's feet, whistled loudly again and again, and shouted:

"Gone. Flown! the Hebrew! the young one!"

And troubling himself no further about the elder prisoner, he at once began the search.

Hoarse with rage, he gave his orders rapidly; all were clear, and all were forthwith obeyed.

While some of his men collected the gang, counted them over, and bound them together with cords, the leader, with the rest, and helped by dogs, sought some trace of the fugitive.

Joshua saw him bring the beasts to sniff at the cords Ephraïm had gnawed through, and the place

where he had lain, and then they started direct for the ravine. He breathed hard as he perceived that they lingered there some little time, and at last, just as the moon again came through the clouds, emerged on the shore and rushed down to the water's edge. He was glad that Ephraim had waded through it instead of running round it, for the dogs here lost the scent, and many minutes slipped by while the guards and the dogs, who poked their noses into every footprint left by the runaway, made their way round the shore to find the trace again. Then their loud tongue told him that they had recovered the scent. But even if they should track and run down the fugitive, the fettered warrior did not now fear the worst, for Ephraim had a long start of his pursuers; still his heart beat fast, and time seemed to stand still till the driver came back again exhausted and unsuccessful. But though he, a man of middle age, could never have overtaken Ephraim, the two youngest and swiftest of his men had been sent after him, as he himself announced with scornful fury.

The man, before so good natured, was entirely changed; for he felt the lad's escape as a disgrace he could hardly get over, nay, as a positive misfortune.

And the wretch who had tried to mislead him by crying out "A Jackal," was the fugitive's accomplice. Loudly did he curse Prince Siptah who had interfered in the duties of his place. But it should not happen again, and he would make his victims suffer for his misfortune! The prisoners were immediately loaded with chains again. Hosea was coupled with an asthmatic old man, and the whole gang were made to stand in a row where the fire-light fell on them, till daybreak; Hosea could make no reply to the questions put to him by his new companion in bonds; he awaited in painful suspense the return of the pursuers. Meanwhile he strove to control his thoughts to prayer, beseeching the Lord, who had promised to be his Helper, on his own behalf and on that of his nephew. Often enough to be sure, he was interrupted by the driver, who vented his wrath on him.

However, the Hebrew who had in his day been captain of a host, submitted to everything, and commanded himself to endure whatever came, like the inevitable discomfort of rain or hail; nay, it cost him some little effort to conceal his gladness when the young runners who had been after Ephraim came in after sunrise, breathless and with disordered hair,

bringing with them nothing but a dog with a broken skull.

The driver could therefore do no more than report what had happened to the soldiers in the first fort on the Etham frontier, which the prison gang must now cross; and to this point the file of men were now led.

Since Ephraim's flight all the men on guard had changed their tone for a harder one. Yesterday the unhappy wretches had been allowed to proceed at an easy pace; now they were hurried on as fast as possible. The day was sultry, and the scorching sun struggled with the storm-clouds, which were gathering in the north into dense masses. Hosea's frame, inured to every kind of fatigue, could resist the severity of this forced march, but his more feeble companion, who had grown grey as a scribe, often stumbled, and at length lay where he fell. At this the driver saw the necessity of placing the sufferer on an ass, and fettering Joshua to another companion. This was the first man's brother, an overseer of the King's stables, a well grown Egyptian who was going to the mines for no other cause than that it was his misfortune to be the brother of a State criminal. Linked to this sturdy mate walking was much easier, and Joshua listened to him with

sincere sympathy, and tried to cheer him when, in a low voice, he confided to him all his woes, lamenting sadly that he had left a wife and child at home in want and misery. Two of his children had died of the pestilence, and it weighed on his heart that he had been prevented from caring for their burial, for thus the two beings he had loved were lost to him for ever, even in the other world.

At their second resting-place the bereaved father spoke more freely. His soul was consumed by thirst for revenge, and he took it for granted that his companion felt the same, seeing that he had fallen into disgrace from a high office. The overseer of the stables had a sister-in-law who was one of the ladies about Pharaoh's Court, and through her and her sister, his wife, he had been informed that a conspiracy against the King was being hatched in the women's house.* Aye, and he knew too who it was that the women purposed to set in Menephtah's place.

As Joshua looked at him with an enquiring and doubtful gaze his comrade whispered:

“Siptah, the King's nephew, and his noble

* The house of the secluded ones; equivalent to the harem of the modern Moslem Egyptian.

mother are at the head of the plot. If only I get free I will bear you in mind; and my sister-in-law is sure not to forget me."

He then desired to know what had brought the Hebrew to the mines, and Joshua frankly told him who he was. When the Egyptian heard that he was linked together with an Hebrew he tore madly at his chains, and cursed his fate; however, his wrath presently died out before the amazing coolness with which Joshua endured the hardest things, and to Joshua himself it was a relief that his partner besieged his ear less often with complaints and questions.

For whole hours he could walk on unmolested, and give himself up wholly to his longing, to collecting his thoughts, to giving himself a clear account of the terrible experiences which his soul had gone through in the last few days, and to making up his mind to his new and dreadful situation.

This silent meditation and introspection did him good; and when they again stopped for the night, he enjoyed deep and refreshing sleep.

When he awoke the stars were still bright in the western sky, reminding him of the sycomore at Succoth, and the all-important morning when his beloved had won him over to serve her God. Above

him spread the sparkling firmament, and for the first time he was conscious of a budding hope that the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth might find some way and means of saving the people He had called His own from the overwhelming host of the Egyptians.

When he had thus fervently besought the Lord to spread his protecting hand over the feeble tribes who, in obedience to His Word, had left so much behind them, and had so confidently set forth for the remote unknown, he commended his old father, whom he himself could not defend, to His especial care, and his soul was filled with wondrous peace.

The shouts of the men on guard, the rattle of fetters, his wretched fellow victims, everything about him kept him in mind of the fate before him. He must henceforth toil day and night in abject slavery, in a sweltering, choking cavern, bereft of the joy of breathing the fresh air of heaven, or of seeing the sunshine; loaded with chains, flogged and reviled, starving and athirst, in a gloomy monotony of misery, agonising alike to body and soul; and yet not for a moment did he lose his confident trust that this fearful fate was intended for any other rather than him, and that something would intervene to preserve him from it.

On their further march eastward which began at dawn, he could only think of this confidence as folly; still he strove to cling fast to it, and he succeeded.

Their way lay across the desert, and after a few hours' brisk march they reached the first fort called "Seti's Stronghold." In the clear air of the desert they had seen it for a long time, looking as though they could shoot an arrow into it. It stood up from the bare stony soil, ungraced by a palm or a shrub, with its wooden stockade, its ramparts, its scarped walls, its watch-tower looking westward, with a broad flat roof swarming with men-at-arms. The garrison had been warned from Pithom that the Hebrews were preparing to break through the frontier-lines on the Isthmus, and the gang of prisoners with their guards had been taken, from a distance, for the van of the emigrant Israelites.

From the top of the huge crown-work which projected like a balcony from all sides of the scarped walls to prevent the use of scaling-ladders, soldiers were spying out between the battlements at the approaching party; but the archers had replaced their arrows in the quivers, for it had at once been perceived that the troop was a small one, and a runner had delivered the pass from the military

authorities, desiring the captain of the garrison to permit the file of prisoners to cross the frontier. The door in the palisade was thrown open to them, and the driver gave them leave to stretch their limbs awhile on the hot pavement within. From hence none could escape, even if the guard left them to themselves; for the fence was too high to climb, and arrows shot from the roof of the building or from the loopholes of the projecting battlements would overtake the runaway.

It did not escape the warrior's eye that everything here was in a state of preparation for resistance, as though it were war time. Every man was at his post, and guards stood by the great metal gongs on the roof, with heavy mallets in their hands to beat an alarm at the approach of the expected foe; for though there was not a tree or a house to be seen as far as the eye could reach, the sound would ring out to the next fort on the frontier line, and warn the garrison, or bring them to the rescue. It was not indeed a punishment, but a piece of ill-fortune to be quartered in these isolated desert stations, and the chiefs of Pharaoh's army took care that the same companies did not remain too long at a time in this wilderness.

Joshua himself had in former years commanded

the most southerly of these strongholds, known as Migdol of the South; for the name of Migdol was common to them all, meaning in the Semitic tongue a fortress-tower.

Here his people were evidently still expected; nor could he for a moment think that Moses would have led them back into Egypt. Either they had lingered in Succoth, or they had marched southwards; but to the south lay the Bitter lakes and the Red sea, and how should the Hebrew multitude cross those deep waters? Hosea's heart beat anxiously as he reflected on this, and his fears were presently confirmed, for he heard the Captain of the fortress telling the driver of the gang that the Hebrews had come, some days since, very near the frontier line of defence, and then had turned off to the southward. Since then it would seem that they had been wandering in the desert between Pithom and the Red Sea. All this had forthwith been reported at Tanis, but the King had been obliged to postpone the departure of the Army till after the first seven days of mourning for the heir to the throne. This delay might have given the Israelites an immense advantage; but a message had to-day come by a carrier pigeon, announcing that the foolish multitude were encamped at Pihahiroth, not

far from the Red Sea, so that it would be an easy task for the army to drive them into the waters like a herd of cattle, for there was no escape in any other direction.

The driver had listened to this report with much satisfaction, and he whispered a few words to the Captain, pointing at Joshua, who, for his part, had already recognised the officer as a companion in arms who had served under him as a centurion, and to whom he had shown much kindness. It was painful to him to reveal himself in this miserable plight to one who had been his subaltern, and who owed him a debt of obligation, and as he looked at him the Captain coloured, shrugging his shoulders expressively, as if to convey to Hosea his pity for his ill-fortune and the impossibility of doing anything to amend it. Then he said in a voice so loud that the Hebrew must hear him: "I am forbidden by the rules to speak with your prisoners, but I knew that man in better days, and I will send you out some wine which I beg you will share with him."

Then they presently went towards the gateway, the driver remarking that Hosea was less deserving of such favour than other and weaker men, inasmuch as he had assisted the runaway of whom he

had spoken, to make his escape. The Captain pushed his fingers through his hair and replied: "I could have wished to show him some kindness, though indeed he owes me much already. But if that is the case I had better keep my wine.—And you have rested quite long enough here!"

So the driver wrathfully roused his hapless gang to proceed on their way across the desert and onward to the mines.

Joshua now walked with a bowed head. His spirit rebelled against the ill fortune which had led him to this pass, dragged across the desert, far from his people and from his father, who must be in great danger, at this decisive and fateful crisis. Under his guidance the Hebrews might perhaps have found a way of escape! He clenched his fists at the thought that his chains forbid his carrying out the means he could devise of helping his people; and yet he would not lose heart, and each time that his reason told him that the Hebrews were lost, that they must perish in this contest, his own name—the new name bestowed on him by God—sounded in his ears, and his hatred and scorn for everything Egyptian, fanned into life by the young officer's base conduct, flamed up afresh.

His whole nature was in violent revolt, and as

the driver marked his burning cheeks and the lurid light in his eye, he thought that even this strong fellow had become a prey to the fever to which so many prisoners fell victims on their way.

When, at sundown, the melancholy train encamped for the night in the heart of the desert, Joshua's spirit still seethed and surged within him; and the scene around him matched well with the tumult in his soul. Again the black clouds came up from the sea on the North wind, which howled and shrieked and whirled clouds of burning sand over the prisoners as they lay, till the lightning and thunder broke over them with a deluge of rain. A thick layer of sand for their coverlet, pools and rivulets were now their bed. Their keepers had bound them together by the arms and legs, and as they stood, shivering and dripping, they still held the ends of the ropes; for the night was as black as the fuel of the fires which the storm had extinguished, and who could have followed a runaway through such darkness and such weather?

But Hosea had no thoughts of flight. While the Egyptians whimpered and quaked, believing that they heard the angry voice of Set in the thunder, and while blinding sheets of flame flared among the clouds, he felt the near presence of that jealous God

whose rage he shared, whose hatred was as his own. Here he stood, the witness of His All-destroying power, and his breast swelled with pride as he said to himself that he had been called to wield the sword of the Lord of Lords.

CHAPTER III.

THE storm which had risen at nightfall was still sweeping over the peninsula. High waves beat in the central lakes, and the Red Sea, which formed two deep creeks from the south, like the horns of a snail, was tossing wildly. Further north too, where Pharaoh's army had just encamped under shelter of the southern Migdol, the strongest of the Etham frontier fortresses, the air was filled with sand by the storm, and in the quarters of the King and his nobles, hammers were kept constantly at work, driving the tent pegs deeper into the ground; for the brocade, cloth, and linen, of which Pharaoh's wandering shelter and its surroundings were formed, were so wrenched by the wind that they threatened to pull up the poles which supported them.

Black clouds hung in the north, yet the moon and stars were often visible, and distant lightning frequently illuminated the darkness. But the dews of heaven still seemed to shun this rainless tract of land, and in every direction fires were burning, round

which thick circles of soldiers were gathered and, like a living screen from the storm, crowded together for protection against being blown away.

The men on watch had trying work, for in spite of the north wind the air was stifling, and continually blew gusts of sand full in their faces.

At the most northern gate of the camp only two sentries walked to and fro, keeping a sharp look out; but they were sufficient, for in consequence of the bad weather it was a long time since any one had appeared to demand either admission or exit. At last, three hours after sunset, a slender lad, half boy, half youth, appeared. He went with steady step up to the watch and shewing him a messenger's token, asked the way to Prince Siptah's tent. He looked as if he had had a difficult journey; his thick black hair was dishevelled, and his feet covered with dust and caked in mud. Yet he roused no suspicions, for his manner was independent and free, his messenger's pass in perfect order, and the letter which he bore was clearly directed to the Prince; a scribe of the granary who was sitting at the next fire with other officers and subalterns, confirmed the fact.

Since the youth's appearance pleased most of them, and as he came from Tanis and perhaps

brought news, he was invited to take a place at the fire and share their meal; but he was in haste.

Thanking them he refused, answered their questions shortly and quickly, and asked one of the company to be his guide. Immediately one of them put himself at his disposal. But he soon learned that it was not easy to achieve seeing a member of the Royal household; for the tents of Pharaoh, his relations and dignitaries, stood apart in the very heart of the camp, enclosed by the shields of the heavily armed foot soldiers; and when he tried to pass in he was referred from one to another, and his messenger's token and the Prince's letter were repeatedly examined. His guide was also dismissed, and in his place an official of high rank known as "the eye and ear of the King" came forward, and began to meddle with the seal of the letter. The bearer very decidedly demanded the missive back; and directly he had it in his hand once more he went towards two tents standing side by side and shaken by the wind, which were pointed out to him as those of Prince Siptah and Kasana, Hornecht's daughter, for whom he had also enquired. A Chamberlain came out of the Prince's tent, to whom he showed the letter he bore, requesting him to conduct him to his lord; but the official having

desired him to hand the letter to him instead of to the Prince, Ephraim, for he it was, consented to do so on condition of the chamberlain's forthwith procuring him admission to Kasana's presence.

The steward seemed most anxious to get the letter into his own hands. After he had examined Ephraim from top to toe, he asked him whether Kasana knew him, and when the other answered in the affirmative and added that he brought a verbal message for her, the Egyptian smiling said: "Good, then; but we must protect our carpets from such feet, and you seem to me altogether exhausted and in need of refreshment. Follow me!"

Thereupon he led him into a little tent, before which an old slave, and another who was still almost a child, sat by the fire concluding their evening meal with a bunch of garlic.

On seeing their master they sprang up; he ordered the old man to wash the messenger's feet, and the young one to fetch, in his name, meat, bread and wine from the Prince's tent. He then took Ephraim into his own tent, which was lighted by a lantern, and asked him how it was that he, who looked so little like a serf or a common fellow, had such a forlorn appearance. Then the messenger answered that he had on his way bound up the

wounds of a severely injured man with his upper garment, so the steward at once opened his packages and handed him a wrapper of fine linen.

Ephraim's reply, which was very near the truth, was given with such promptness and sounded so genuine, that it was believed; and the steward's kindness so overwhelmed him with gratitude that he raised no objection when, with a practiced hand and without damaging the seal, he pressed the flexible roll of papyrus, bent the separate layers apart, and, peeping in to the opening acquainted himself with the contents of the letter. At the same time the burly courtier's eyes glistened keenly, and it seemed to the youth that the man's face, which at first had appeared to him with its comfortable fullness and round smoothness the very mirror of good nature, had become like that of a cat.

As soon as the Steward had finished this operation he begged the boy to rest himself thoroughly; and he did not return until Ephraim had bathed, and stood with the new linen cloth round his loins, his hair anointed and scented, looking in the mirror, and in the act of putting a broad gold hoop round his arm.

He had hesitated for some time, as he knew he was about to face great dangers; this bracelet how-

ever was his only valuable possession, and he had taken great trouble during his captivity to keep it hidden in his loin-cloth. It might yet render him good service, though if he wore it it would attract attention to his person and increase his risk of being recognised. But the image he saw reflected in the mirror, his vanity, and the wish to find favour in Kasana's eyes, triumphed over prudence, and the costly ornament was soon shining on his arm. The Chamberlain gazed with amazement at the transformation of the unkempt messenger into a proud-looking youth; the question rose to his lips whether he were some kin to Kasana, and when Ephraim replied in the negative, he asked to what family he belonged.

At this Ephraim stood for some time with downcast eyes and besought the Egyptian to excuse him from replying till he should have spoken to Kasana. The other shook his head doubtingly as he looked at him; but he urged him no further, for what he had discovered from the letter was a secret which might cost all who knew it their life, and the handsome young bearer must surely be the son of some great man implicated in the plot of his master, Prince Siptah. The stout, well-fed courtier shivered at the thought, and it was with a sympathetic qualm that

he looked at this blooming flower of humanity, so young to be mixed up in such perilous schemes. The Prince had so far only hinted at the secret to him, so he could still cut himself adrift from sharing his master's destiny. If he parted from him, he might look forward to an old age of ease; but if he clung to him, and the Prince's plot should come to a good issue, to what heights might he not rise! How terribly important was the choice which he, the father of a large family, was called upon to make; the sweat stood on his brow, and he was quite incapable of clear reflection, as he conducted Ephraim to Kasana's tent and then hastened to his master's.

All was still in the slight erection of wooden poles and heavy bright-coloured stuffs which sheltered the fair widow. It was with a beating heart that Ephraim approached the entrance; and when at length he took courage and pushed aside the curtain which was pegged to the ground, the wind filling it like a sail, he saw a dark room, opening on either hand into another. That to the left was as dark as the centre one; but from the right, lights gleamed through the seams in the canvas. The tent was of the long flat-roofed shape in three compartments, such as he had often seen;

and in the room whence the light proceeded was she, no doubt, to whom he came. To avoid any further suspicions he must overcome this timidity, and he had already stooped to untie the knot by which the curtain was held to the peg in the ground, when that of the lighted compartment was raised and a woman's figure came into the dark entrance room.

Was it she? should he venture to address her? Yes, he must.

He clenched his hand tightly, and with a deep breath collected his courage, as though he were about to intrude unbidden into the inner sanctuary of a temple. Then he pushed the curtain aside and was met with a cry from the woman he had before observed; and he now recovered his courage, for it was not Kasana, but the waiting-woman who had come with her to see the prisoners, and who had accompanied her to the camp. She recognised him too, and stared at him as though he had risen from the dead. They knew each other well; for, the first time he had been carried to Hornecht's house, it was she who had prepared his bath and laid balsam on his wounds; and on the second occasion when they had been inmates under the same roof, she and her mistress had nursed him.

For many an hour had they chatted together, and he knew that she was fond of him, for as he lay half conscious, half dazed with feverish dreams, she would soothe him with a motherly touch, and as he grew stronger, was never weary of questioning him about his people, telling him that she herself was a Syrian, of kindred blood to the Hebrew. Indeed his language was not altogether strange to her, for it was as a woman of twenty that she had been brought to Egypt with other prisoners by Rameses the Great. Ephraim, she would say, reminded her of her own son when he was younger. From this woman he had nothing to fear; he seized her hand, and said in a low voice that he had escaped from his guards, and had come to ask counsel of her mistress and herself. The word "escaped" was enough to reassure the old woman, for Spirits, as she understood the word, were wont to put others to flight but not to flee. She stroked the lad's curls, and before he had finished speaking she had left him, hurrying off into the other room to inform her mistress that he stood without.

In a few minutes Ephraim was in the presence of the woman who had become the guiding star and warming sun of his life. With flushing cheeks he gazed up at her lovely features, and although it

stabbed him to the heart that, before she even vouchsafed him a greeting, she enquired whether Hosea were with him, he forgot that foolish pang as he noted with what kindness she looked at him. And when she asked the serving-woman whether she did not think him looking fresh and well and grown more manly, he felt as though he really were taller and bigger, and his heart beat higher than ever. She insisted on knowing all that had happened to his uncle, down to the smallest detail; then, after he had done her bidding, and at last indulged his desire to speak of his own fortunes, she interrupted him to consult with the older woman as to how he might be sheltered from malignant eyes and fresh dangers; and the means were soon found.

First, with Ephraim's help the nurse closed the front entrance to the tent, as completely as possible, and she then showed him the dark room, into which he was to vanish quickly and noiselessly whenever she should give him a signal.

Kasana meanwhile had poured out a cup of wine for the returned wanderer, and when he came in again with the old woman, she bid him lie down on the giraffe-skin at her feet, and asked him how he had got past the men on guard, and what he looked

to do in the future. She must tell him in the first instance, that her father had remained at Tanis, so he need have no fear of being recognised and betrayed by Hornecht. It was easy enough to see and hear how glad she was at this meeting; nay, when Ephraim told her that it was in consequence of Prince Siptah's orders that the prisoners should be unfettered—which they owed solely to her—that he had been able to make good his escape, she clapped her hands like a child. But then her brow darkened, and she added with a sigh, that her heart had been breaking with anxiety and fears; but that now Hosea should see how much a woman could sacrifice to attain the dearest wish of her heart. Ephraim's assurance that before he himself stole away, he had offered to release his uncle, met with its meed of kind words; and when she learned that Joshua had refused his nephew's help in order that he might not imperil the success of the plan he had suggested to him, she exclaimed to the waiting woman, with tears in her eyes, that no one but he could act so nobly; and she listened eagerly to the rest of the lad's tale, interrupting him frequently with sympathetic questions.

So blissful a close to the fearful nights and days he had just passed, seemed to him as a beautiful

dream, a bewildering romance; and he did not need the encouragement of the cup she diligently filled for him to make him tell his story with eager vivacity. With an eloquence altogether new to him he described how, in the ravine, he had slipped on a loose stone and had fallen with it headlong to the bottom. There he had thought that all was lost, for soon after he had shaken himself clear of the rubbish in which he was buried, to hurry down to the Salt Lake, he had heard the drivers' whistle. However, from his childhood he had always been a good runner, and he had learned in his native fields how to read his bearings by the stars, so, without looking to the right hand or to the left, he had flown on as fast as his feet would carry him, to the south, always to the south. Many times had he fallen in the dark over stones or pits in the desert sand, but only to spring up again and hurry on to where he knew that she, Kasana, was—she, for whose sake he would unhesitatingly cast to the winds all that wise-heads could advise—she for whom he was ready to give life and liberty.

How he found courage to make this confession he knew not. Nor was he sobered by the tap she gave him with her fan, or by the old woman's exclamation "A boy like that!" No! his beaming eyes

only sought her gaze as they had done before, while he went on with his story.

The dog which had come up with him he had hurled against a rock; the other he had driven off by flinging stones at him till he retreated, whining, into a thicket. He had seen nothing of any other pursuers neither that night nor all the next day. At last he reached a high-road and came up with some country-folk who told him which way the King's Army had marched. Then about midday, being overcome by fatigue, he had gone to sleep in the shade of a sycomore, and when he woke the sun was near setting. He was dreadfully hungry, so he had pulled a few turnips in a field as he passed by; but the owner had immediately come forward from a water-course at hand, and it was with difficulty that he had escaped from his pursuit. During part of the next night he had kept to the high road, and had rested at last by a well on the way, for he knew that wild beasts shun much frequented spots. After sunrise he had set forth again, following the road the army had taken, and had come upon its traces everywhere. Shortly before noon, when he was quite exhausted and sick with fasting, he came to a village lying close to the fertile tract watered by the Seti Canal, and had considered whether it would not be

well to sell his gold bracelet to purchase some good nourishment, and keep some silver and copper coin for future need; but he had feared being taken for a thief and cast into prison again, for the thorns had torn his raiment and his sandals had long since dropped from his feet. He had thought that his misery must move even the hard-hearted to pity, so he had knocked at a door and begged, bitter as it had been to him. However, he got nothing from the peasant but a scornful admonition that such a strong young fellow as he might work for his living, and leave begging to the weak and old. A second had threatened him with a thrashing; however, when he had gone some way further, feeling very crestfallen, a young woman, who had seen him at the niggard's door, came after him and put a cake of bread with a few dates into his hand, hastily telling him that the village had been heavily taxed in the course of Pharaoh's progress, or she would have given him something better. No banquet had ever before tasted as sweet to him as this unlooked for gift, which he ate by the next well; but he did not confess that it had been embittered by the doubt as to whether he should obey Joshua's counsel and return to his own people, or follow his heart's desire which drew him to her. He had started again, still undecided;

but fate seemed to have taken the matter into her own hands. After he had walked on about half an hour longer on reaching the edge of the desert, he had come upon a youth of about his own age, sitting by the wayside and moaning as he held one of his feet in both hands. He had gone up to him at his call, and to his surprise had recognised him as Hornecht's runner and messenger with whom he had often spoken.

"Apoo! our nimble Nubian!" interrupted the lady; and Ephraim went on to tell her that this messenger had been sent to carry a letter to Prince Siptah in all haste, and the swift footed lad, who was wont to outrun his master's horses, would have flown like an arrow and have reached his destination in two hours, if he had not trodden on a fragment of broken glass—a bottle crushed by some chariot wheel—and the cut was dreadfully deep.

"And you helped him?" asked Kasana.

"Could I do otherwise?" was the answer. "He had half bled to death already and was as pale as a sheet. So I carried him to the nearest canal and washed his gaping wound, and applied some ointment he had with him."

"I put it in his pocket a year ago, in a small pot," said the nurse, who, being easily moved, was

wiping her eyes: and Ephraim confirmed the fact, for Apoo had mentioned it with gratitude. Then he went on:

"I tore my tunic into strips and bound his foot up as best I might. But he urged me all the while to make haste, and held out the token and the note which his master had entrusted to him, and knowing nothing of the misfortunes which had befallen me, he charged me to carry the letter to the Prince in his stead. Oh! how gladly I undertook to do so, and the second hour was not ended when I reached the camp. The letter is in the Prince's hands, and here am I, and I can see by your face that you are well pleased. As for me— So happy as I am to sit here at your feet and gaze up at you, so thankful as I am to you for having listened to me so patiently, surely, no one ever was in this world! And if they put me in chains I will bear it quietly if only you remain kind. My woes have been so many; I have neither father nor mother—nor any one to love me, only you.—I love none but you, and you will not repel me, will you?"

He spoke the last words like one in a frenzy. Carried away by his passion, incapable, after the terrible strain of the last days and hours, of governing the overwhelming storm of his feelings, the lad

sobbed aloud. He was scarcely past childhood yet, he had only himself to trust to, he had been torn and severed from all that had ever upheld and controlled him, and, like a young bird taking refuge under its mother's wings, he hid his face in Kasana's lap, weeping violently.

Deep compassion came over the tender hearted young woman, and her eyes too were moist. She gently laid her hand on his hair; and as she felt the shudder which ran through the boy's whole frame, she raised his head in both hands, kissed his forehead and cheeks, and smiling through tears, as she looked into his face, said:

"You poor, foolish boy! why should I not be kind to you, or repel, you? Your uncle is the man dearest to me in the world, and you are as a son to him. To serve him and you I have already consented to do that which I had always utterly loathed and refused. But now, come what may, and whatever others may think or say of me, I will not care, if only I can succeed in doing that for which I will give my life and all I hold most dear.—Only wait, poor vehement boy," and again she kissed his cheeks, "I will smooth the way for you too! Now, enough of this."

She spoke firmly, and the words were enough

to check the excited lad's words. But, suddenly, she sprang up, crying in terrified haste: "Fly, fly, begone instantly!"

A man's footstep approaching the tent, and a warning word from the waiting woman had brought the brief command to Kasana's lips, and Ephraim's keen ear told him what had roused her fears, and drove him forthwith into the dark chamber, whence he could satisfy himself that a moment's hesitation would have betrayed him. The curtain of the tent was lifted and a man walked straight through the anteroom to the lighted apartment where Kasana—for that too he could hear—greeted some new guest only too warmly, and as though surprised at his coming so late.

The waiting woman snatched up her own mantle to throw over the lad's bare shoulders, and she whispered to him: "Linger near the tent sometime before sunrise, but do not come in till I call you if you love your life. You have neither father nor mother, and my child Kasana—a loving heart is hers, a heart of gold—she is the best of all that is good; but whether she is fit to guide a foolish scapegrace who burns for her like dry straw, is quite another matter. As I listened to your story, I thought of many things, and as I mean well by you, I will

tell you something: You have an uncle who is the noblest of men—I know what men are, and so far my Kasana is right. Do his bidding. It will be for your good. Obey him! And if his orders take you far from here and from Kasana, so much the better for you. We walk in dangerous places, and if it were not for Hosea's sake, I should have done everything in my power to hold her back. But for him—well, I am an old woman, but for that man, even I would go through fire and water. I grieve more than I can say for that pure sweet child, and for you, who are so like what my own son was; but I say once more, obey your uncle, boy, or you will come to an evil end, and that would be a pity indeed."

Then, without waiting for a reply, she pushed him towards one of the openings in the canvas wall of the tent, and waited till Ephraim had wriggled out. Then she dried her eyes and went back into the lighted room as though by chance; but Kasana and her belated visitor had matters to discuss which allowed of no witness, and her "dear child" only suffered her to light her own little lamp at the three armed candelabrum, and then sent her to bed.

She submitted; but in the darkened room, where her bed stood not far from her mistress's, she lay

down, and then, covering her face with her hands, wept in silence.

To this good soul, the world seemed to be turned upside down. She could not think what Kasana, her darling foster-child, would be at. She was forfeiting purity and honour to a man whom—as she well knew—she loathed in her soul. And this monstrous sacrifice she was making for Hosea, who though he was no doubt worthy of her love, had scorned it; whereas any other woman would have rejoiced over the punishment brought upon him by the avenging gods.

CHAPTER IV.

EPHRAIM crept round the tent he had quitted, pressing an ear against the canvas wall. He very cautiously undid a few of the stitches in one of the seams, and so could see as well as hear what was going on in the lady's sitting room. The storm kept everyone within shelter who was not compelled by service to turn out, and Ephraim had the less reason to fear discovery because the spot where he crouched was in deep shade. The old nurse's cloak was wrapped about him, and though a shudder again and again ran through his young limbs, it was bitter grief that caused it and anguish of soul.

He saw Kasana's head resting on the breast of a prince, a great and powerful lover, and the capricious false one did not even forbid the bold suitor when his lips sought hers for the kisses he desired. She owed no faith to Ephraim indeed, but her heart was his uncle's; she preferred him above all men, she had declared herself ready to endure the worst to procure his freedom, and now he saw with his

own eyes that she was false and faithless, and giving to another that which by right was Hosea's alone. To Ephraim himself she had shown favour,—the mere crumbs which fell from Hosea's table, and even that, as he confessed with a flush, was a robbery from his uncle; and he felt himself injured, wounded, and betrayed, and on fire with jealousy on behalf of his uncle, whom he honoured, nay, and loved, though he had contravened his wishes.

And Hosea? He, like Ephraim himself, and like that princely personage, like everyone in short, must surely love her in spite of his strange demeanour at the way-side well; it could not possibly be otherwise; while she, safe from the vengeance of the unhappy prisoner, was abandoning herself with cowardly baseness to the caresses of another!

Siptah, as he had learnt from their last meeting, was his uncle's foe; for him of all men, she was betraying the man she loved. Through the slit in in the tent-cloth he could see all that went on within, but he closed his eyes to avoid seeing many things. More often, indeed, the odious spectacle rivetted his gaze with a mysterious spell, and then he longed to tear the rent wider, to fell the loathed foe, and speak words of stern reproof to the faithless woman, in Hosea's name. The fierce passion

which had possessed him was suddenly turned to hatred and scorn. From the happiest of human beings, as he had deemed himself, he had become the most miserable. Such a fall from the highest bliss to the deepest woe, none before him, he believed, had ever known. The old nurse had spoken truly, there could be nothing in store for him at Kasana's hands but misery and despair. Once he had started to fly, but then the bewitching sound of her silvery laugh fell on his ear, and a mysterious power held him rooted to the spot to listen a little longer.

At first the rush of blood tingled so fiercely in his ears that he was quite incapable of following the dialogue within. By degrees, however, he had gathered the purport of whole sentences, and now he lost not a word that was spoken. It was indeed of the greatest interest, though it enabled him to look into an abyss which seemed to yawn at his feet.

Kasana by no means yielded to her audacious wooer on every point, but this only drew him on to insist passionately on her entire surrender, body and soul; and what he offered in return was indeed the highest reward—a place as Queen at his side on the throne of Egypt, for which he was plotting.

That much he distinctly uttered, but all else was hard to follow; for the vehement lover was in haste, and frequently interrupted his incoherent sentences to assure Kasana of his unutterable devotion, or to mollify her, when the audacity of his pretensions roused her fears or her disgust. Presently he spoke of the letter which Ephraim had brought, and after he had read it aloud and explained it to her, the boy perceived, with a shudder, that he himself had now become an accomplice in the most detestable of crimes. For a moment he felt prompted to betray the traitors and deliver them into the hands of the sovereign whose overthrow they were plotting. But he cast this idea from him, and only indulged in the comforting reflection—the first that had come to him during this dreadful experience—that he held Kasana and her prince in his clutch like chafers on a thread. This raised his spirits and restored his lost confidence and courage. The baser the schemes he now overheard, the greater and more surely grew his recovered sense of the value of truth and right. He remembered likewise an admonition of his uncle's: "Give no man, great or small, cause to regard you with anything but respect, and then you may hold your head as high as the proudest hero in his purple tunic and gilt breastplate!"

As he had lain trembling with fever on his bed in Kasana's house he had repeated the saying many times, but the miseries of captivity had banished it from his mind; not till he found himself in the chamberlain's tent, when the slave had held the mirror that he might see himself bathed and anointed, had it recurred to him as a passing thought; but now it wholly possessed his soul. And, strangely enough, the royal traitor within the tent wore, in fact, a purple tunic and gilt armour, and looked indeed a hero; but he could not hold his head high, for the deed he proposed could only succeed in twilight secrecy; it was like the work of a loathsome mole which turns up the earth in the darkness. The hateful three: Falsehood, Treachery and Perjury, were Siptah's tools, and she whom he had chosen to be his accomplice was the woman—at the bottom of his soul, he was ashamed to own it—the woman for whose sake he had been ready to sacrifice all he held sacred, worthy and dear.

These hideous things, which he had been taught to flee from, were but the rungs of the ladder by which that wicked man hoped to mount to high estate. Ephraim saw it all: the prince's plot lay before him as an open book.

The roll the lad had brought to the camp had

contained three letters. One was from the conspirators in Tanis, the others from Siptah's mother. She wrote that she looked for her son's speedy return, and informed him that Aarsu the Syrian, the Captain of the foreign troops now in charge of the palace, and all in the women's house, were prepared to hail him King. As soon as the High Priest of Amon, who was at the same time the Chief Judge, High Steward and Keeper of the Seal, should proclaim him, he would be King and could mount the throne unopposed, for the palace stood open to him. If Pharaoh should return, the body-guard were ready to take him prisoner and put him out of the way—as Siptah, who did not love half measures, had secretly commanded, though Baie had voted for his being kept in mild captivity.

The only thing to be feared was the premature re-appearance of Seti, Menephtah's younger son, now at Thebes; for now that his elder brother was dead he had become heir to the throne, and pigeons had arrived yesterday with letters announcing that he was on his way. Thus Siptah and the powerful priest who was to proclaim him must make the best speed they could.

The necessary precautions had also been taken to prevent any possible resistance on the part of the

army; as soon as the Hebrews were destroyed, the larger portion of the troops were to be withdrawn forthwith into the garrisons they had left; the body-guard were attached to Siptah, and the rest, who would escort the royal party back to the capital, could, if it came to the worst, easily be overpowered by Aarsu and his mercenaries.

"Nothing now remains for me to do," cried the Prince, stretching himself with evident enjoyment, like a man who has successfully achieved a difficult undertaking, "but to make my way back to Tanis with Baie a few hours hence, to let myself be crowned and proclaimed in the Temple of Amon, and finally make my entry into the palace of the Pharaohs. The rest is all a matter of course. Seti, who is called the heir to the crown, is as weak a creature as his father, and will bend to the accomplished fact, to necessity and force. The Captain of the body-guard will take care that Menephtah never enters the palace again."

The Prince's mother had written a second letter, addressed to Pharaoh himself, to justify Siptah and the High Priest in returning to the capital in all haste, without exposing the Prince to the imputation of cowardice in leaving the army immediately

before a battle. Although she had never in her life been in better health she declared with hypocritical prayers and lamentations that her hours were numbered, and implored the King to release her son and Baie forthwith from their duties, that she might be allowed to bless her only child before she died. She had many sins on her conscience, and none but the High Priest had it in his power to intercede for her for the mercy of the Gods. Without his mediation she must depart in despair. This letter, too, the vile traitor had read, and had pronounced it a master-piece of woman's cunning, rubbing his hands with glee as he spoke.

Treason, murder, dissimulation, base deceit, a mocking of all the most sacred feelings, everything foul and mean, were to be Siptah's aids to mounting the throne, and though Kasana had wrung her hands and shed some tears when he told her that Pharaoh was to be put out of the way, she grew calmer as the Prince represented to her that her own father approved of what he had decided on, to save Egypt from the hand of the King who was bringing the land to ruin.

The letter from the Prince's mother to Pharaoh—the mother who was spurring on her own son to ruthless crime—was the last thing Ephraim stayed

to hear; for the young Hebrew, accustomed to regard the bond between parents and children as reverend and pure beyond all others, was roused by it to such a sudden frenzy that he raised his fist, and as he sprung away he muttered a word of scorn and abuse. Thus, he did not hear how Kasana made the Prince pledge his word that, if he rose to power, he would grant her first request. It should cost him neither money nor lands, and merely afford her the privilege of showing mercy at the dictate of her heart, for events were impending which must provoke the wrath of the gods, and she only implored to be allowed to mitigate it.

Ephraim could not bear to see or hear more of this revolting scene. Now, for the first time, he began to understand what danger he had run of allowing himself to be drawn into this slough, and becoming a lost and reprobate wretch; but surely, he thought, he could never have been so base, so abominable as these two. Once more he remembered his uncle's words, and he threw back his haughty head, and his deep chest swelled as though he would assure himself of his own unbroken strength; and he said to himself, as he drew a deep breath, that he was fit for better things than being wasted on a bad woman, even if, like Kasana, she

were the fairest and most bewitching creature under Heaven.

Away, Away! far from the snare which might have led him to murder and every kind of evil!

Fully determined to return to his own people, he made his way to the entrance to the camp; but he had gone only a few steps when he stopped, and a glance at the sky showed him it was not more than two hours past midnight. All was still. Only from the pen where the King's horses were enclosed he heard now and then the rattle of harness or the blow of a hoof. If he attempted at this hour to make his escape, he must certainly be detected and detained; prudence enjoined him to curb his impatience for a little while, and as he looked about him, his eye fell on the chamberlain's tent, from which the old slave came out to look for his master, who was still awaiting Siptah's return in the prince's quarters. This old man had been kind before to Ephraim, and he now, with friendly urgency, bid him enter the tent and rest, for, said he, youth requires sleep. Ephraim accepted the well-meant invitation, for he now began to feel how badly his feet ached; hardly had he stretched himself on the mat—the old slave had spread his own for him—when he felt as if his limbs were dropping off; how-

ever, he thought he should here have time and peace for reflect on.

He began by thinking of the future and his uncle's injunctions. That he must forthwith rejoin his people was quite clear, and if they escaped alive from Pharaoh's host, let the rest do what they would, his first duty would be to collect his herdsman, his servants, and his younger friends, and hasten at their head to the mines, to strike off Hosea's chains and conduct him home to his old father and his people who needed him so sorely. He fancied he could see himself with his sling at his girdle and a battle-axe in his hand marching on in front of the rest, when sleep overpowered him, and wrapped the weary youth in oblivion so deep and sweet that not even a dream approached his pillow, and the old slave had to shake him in order to rouse him at daybreak.

The camp was already astir; tents were being taken down, asses and ox-carts loaded, horses combed and shod, chariots cleaned, weapons and vessels polished and the first meal of the day distributed and eaten. Meanwhile trumpet calls rung out on one hand, words of command on the other, and from the eastern side of the camp rose the chant of priests devoutly greeting the newborn god of day.

Active servants now brought out a gilt chariot in front of the splendid purple tent next to Kasana's, and another not less splendid followed. Prince Siptah and the High Priest had received permission from Pharaoh to return to Tanis, at the desire of a dying woman. Shortly after Ephraim took leave of the friendly slave, charging him to return the cloak to Kasana's nurse, and to tell her that the messenger had followed her advice and his uncle's. Then he set forth on his journey.

He got out of the precincts of the Egyptian tents without let or hindrance, and when he found himself out in the desert he uttered the cry by which he was wont to collect his shepherds in the pastures. The call rang out across the wide plains, startling a sparrow-hawk which was spying the distance from the top of a rock, and as the bird soared up the lad felt as though, if he spread out his arms, wings must sprout strong enough to bear him too through the air. Never had he felt so strong and agile, so light and free; and if the priest could at this moment have asked him whether he would become a captain over thousands in Pharaoh's army, he would certainly have answered as he had done by Nun's ruined dwelling, that he asked no better lot than that of a shepherd, free to govern his herds and

servants. He was an orphan, but yet he had his people to whom he belonged, and where they were was his home. Like a traveller who, after long journeying, finds himself near home, he now hastened his steps.

He had arrived at Tanis on the night of the new moon, and the full disk which he now saw paling in the dawn was the same as he had then gazed on; but he felt as though years had elapsed between his leave-taking of Miriam and this day, for indeed a whole lifetime of new experiences had been crowded into these few days. He had come forth as a boy; he was returning a man to his own folk, and, thanks to the events of this one dreadful night, he was the same as he had ever been and could look boldly in the face of each one whom he loved and looked up to with reverence.

Nay, more. He would show the man whom he held high above all others, that he, Ephraim, might carry his head erect. He would repay Joshua for what he had done for him by being content to remain in bonds and fetters in order that his nephew might flee away as free as a bird.

He had walked above an hour when he came to a ruined watch-tower. He climbed up it, and from thence he descried at a great distance, on the hither

side of the hill of Baal Zephon which he had long seen towering above the horizon, the gleaming waters of the Northern arm of the Red Sea. The storm was lulled, still he could see from the swaying of the emerald surface that the sea was not yet calm, and a few black piles of cloud on the sky which just now had been so clear, seemed to threaten a gathering storm again. He looked about him on all sides, wondering what the leaders of the people could be thinking of if indeed, as Siptah had told Kasana, they purposed to encamp between Piha-hiroth, of which he now saw the tents and huts close before him on the shore of the canal of Seti, and the hill of Baal Zephon.

Had Siptah spoken falsely? No indeed! the base traitor had this once departed from his habits; between the village and the lake, where the wind was whirling thin pillars of smoke, his sharp eyes descried a multitude of white objects looking like a distant flock of sheep, and among and around them a strange stir and bustle on the sand. This was the camp of the Israelites.

How small the space appeared which parted him from them! But the nearer they seemed the greater was his anxiety, as he reflected that this vast

multitude, with their women and children, their herds and tents, could never escape the mighty host which in a few hours must inevitably fall upon them. His heart swelled within him as he looked further afield; for neither to the East, where stretched a broad pool of water, nor to the South, where the waves of the Red Sea were surging, nor to the North, whence Pharaoh's army was marching down on them, was there any way to fly. To the west lay the desert of Etham, and if the wanderers turned thitherward they would soon be on Egyptian soil and the exodus would have been in vain. There was nothing for it but to give battle; and as he thought of it his blood ran cold, for he well knew the ill-armed, undisciplined forces of the Hebrews, half wild and refractory, half cowardly and contemptible, and he had seen the march past of the numberless and well-equipped Egyptian army with its strong force of foot soldiers and splendid war-chariots.

He now thought, as his uncle had thought, that the Hebrews were doomed to certain destruction, unless the God of their fathers should save them. Miriam had indeed many a time and again, just before his departure, praised that Almighty Lord and His glory with flashing eyes and inspired words; that God who had chosen his people above all other

people. The words of the prophetess had filled his childish soul with vague terrors of this God's immeasurable greatness and awful wrath. He had found it easier to uplift his spirit to the Sun-God when his teacher, a kind and genial Egyptian priest, had led him into the temple at Pithom. As he grew older he had entirely ceased to feel the need of turning to any god in prayer, for he craved nothing; and while other boys were still obedient to their parents' will, the shepherds, who knew full well that he was the owner of the flocks they tended, had called him their lord, and, at first in jest but then in earnest, had done him service as their master. Thus his independence had been early fostered and he had grown to be but a wrong-headed lad. Healthy and strong, looked up to by men older than himself, he was wholly self-sufficient, and felt that others depended on him; and as there was nothing he liked so little as asking anything of any one great or small, it misliked him to pray even to a God who was so far and so high above him. But at this moment, when the fearful fate impending over his people weighed so heavily on his heart, a sense came upon him that only this Great and Mighty God could deliver them out of their fearful and pressing peril, that none could withstand this vast host but only

He in whose power it lay to break the heavens and the earth in pieces.

And what was he that the Most High, whom Miriam and Hosea had described as of such Majesty, should care for him? But his people were many thousands, and God had not scorned to make them His own and to promise them great things. They were standing on the verge of destruction, and he, fresh from the enemy's camp, was perchance the only soul who understood how great was their peril.

A conviction suddenly came over him that it was he therefore, above all others, whose task it must be to warn the God of his fathers of the great danger which threatened His people, and to beseech him to save them. He, caring for the whole heaven and earth, the sun and the stars, had perhaps forgotten them. The lad was still standing on the top of the ruined tower, and from thence he uplifted his arms and face to Heaven.

To the north he saw the dark clouds which he had observed rising over the blue sky, suddenly part and roll asunder on either hand. The wind which had died away after sunrise, now gained force and swiftness, and soon rose to a storm again. It swept

across the isthmus in gusts which succeeded each other with increasing rapidity, carrying before it dense pillars of yellow sand.

He must cry aloud, very loud, if He whom he entreated was to hear him in high Heaven, and with all the strength of his young lungs he shouted against the storm:—

“Adonai, Adonai! Thou whose name is Jehovah, Thou Great God of my fathers, hearken unto me, Ephraim, who am but young and of no account, and whom, inasmuch as I am but nought, Thou hast not remembered. For myself I ask not, but the people whom thou hast called Thine are in great straits. They have left their safe dwelling and good pastures by reason that Thou hast promised them a better and a fairer land, and that they trusted in Thee and in Thy word. And now the host of Pharaoh is drawing near, and it is so great that our people can never withstand it. Believe me, it is so, Eli, my Lord. For I have seen it and have been in the midst of it, and as surely as I stand here I know that the Egyptians are too many for thy people. Pharaoh’s host will trample them under foot as the hoof of the ox tramples the grain on the threshing floor. And my nation, who are Thy people, are encamped in a place where the warriors

of Pharaoh can cut them off from all sides, so that there is no way left them by which they may escape; not one, for I have seen it from this spot. Hear me, O Adonai! But canst thou hear my cry, O Lord, in such a storm? Yea, surely Thou canst, for Thou art Almighty, and if Thou hear me and understand, Thou mayst, if Thou wilt, behold with Thine own eyes that I speak truth. Then remember, O Lord, and fulfill the promise Thou hast made to Thy people by the mouth of Thy servant Moses.

“I have seen treason among the Egyptians, and murder and base cunning, and their doings have filled me, who am but a simple lad, with rage and horror. And how shouldst Thou from whom all good things come, and whom Miriam names as Truth itself, deal with us even as those accursed ones do, and break Thy word and promise to Thy people who trust in Thee? I know, O Lord most High, that this is far from Thee, and perhaps it is sin only to think of it. Hear me, Adonai! Behold and look to the north upon the hosts of Egypt, which by this hour are leaving their camp and moving on; look to the south upon the peril of Thy people and how that they have no way of escape, and save and deliver them by the help of Thy might and great wisdom; for Thou hast promised

them a new land, and if they are utterly cut off how may they reach it?"

Thus he ended his guileless, untutored prayer, but it flowed from the depths of his heart.

Then he sprang away from the heap of ruins with wide leaps, across the desert at his feet, and ran on towards the south as swiftly as though he were again fleeing from captivity. He felt the rushing blast from the north-east driving him on, and thought how it would hasten the advance of Pharaoh's foot soldiers. The leaders of his people did not know perhaps how vast was the host which threatened them, and underestimated the danger of their position. He had seen it and could give them the fullest information. But he must hasten, fly, and he felt as though in this race before the storm his feet had really got wings.

He had soon reached the village of Pihahiroth, and as he fled through it without pausing for an instant, he perceived that man and beast had deserted the tents and dwellings. The inhabitants had no doubt found a place of refuge for themselves and their belongings, from the coming army or from the emigrant Hebrews. As he went on, the clouds grew darker, though rarely indeed was the sky overcast here at midday; and the wilder blew

the storm. His thick hair flew about his hot head, his breath came hard; still, on he sped, he felt as if his feet scarcely touched the ground at all.

As he got nearer to the sea the blast howled and shrieked, the waves, lashed to fury, beat in thunder on the rocks at the foot of the hill of Baal-Zephon. Now, within a short hour after leaving the ruins, he had reached the first tents of the encampment, and the familiar cry of "Unclean", "Unclean", as well as the mourning garb of the people whose disfigured faces looked out from the wreck of the tents beaten down by the wind, told him that he had come upon the lepers' quarters, placed by Moses outside the camp. Still, he was in such haste that he did not make a circuit, but ran straight on at his utmost speed. Nor did he pause till a tall palm tree, uprooted by the blast, came to the ground so close to him that its tuft of leaves swept him as it fell.

At last he was among the tents and penfolds of his own people, and many of these had likewise been overturned.

He enquired of the first man he recognised for Nun, the father of Joshua and of his deceased mother. He had gone to the seashore with Moses and the

Elders of the people, and Ephraim followed him thither, the moist salt air refreshing him and cooling his brow. Yet he might not immediately speak with him, so he collected his thoughts and recovered his breath, while he watched the Elders who were in discussion with a party of gaily-clad Phœnician boatmen.

He, being so much younger, was forbidden to disturb the venerable leaders of the people in their council, which evidently had reference to the sea, for the Hebrews were pointing to the head of the bay, and the Phœnicians waved their hands now towards the mountain and now to the sea, or the sky, or the north, whence came the still increasing storm.

A jutting wall sheltered the party of Elders from the hurricane, and yet they had great difficulty in keeping their feet, with the help of their staves and the stone-work behind them.

At last the discussion came to an end; the lad saw the gigantically tall figure of Moses slowly and majestically go down to the edge of the sea with some other leaders of the Hebrews, while Nun, supported by one of his herdsmen, toiled back to the camp against the wind with what speed he might. He wore a mourning robe, and whereas the others

looked glad and hopeful as they parted, his handsome face, with its crown and beard of white hair, wore a look of crushing and heartbreaking grief. When Ephraim spoke his name, he raised his bent head and seeing the lad before him, tottered backwards with surprise and misgiving, clinging tightly to the stalwart arm which upheld him. News had been sent to him of his son's and his grandson's terrible fate, from the freed slaves he had left behind him in Tanis. The old man had rent his garments, had strewn ashes on his head and put on mourning raiment, and broken his heart for his beloved and noble son and his promising young grandson!

Now Ephraim was before him in the flesh; and when he had laid his hand on the lad's shoulder and kissed him again and again, he enquired whether his son too was still in the land of the living, and remembered him and his people. As soon as the youth had assured him that he did, Nun laid his arm across his shoulders that he, his own flesh and blood and no stranger, might shield him from the violence of the storm.

He had a solemn and imperative duty to perform, from which no man might hinder him, but when the eager youth shouted in his ear above the roar of the hurricane, as they went back to the

camp, that he meant to gather together his shepherds and the young men of his tribe to rescue Hosea who was now called Joshua, the patriarch's vehement vigour was stirred, and clasping his grandson to his heart, he exclaimed that, old as he was, yet was he not too old to wield an axe and go forth with the young ones to deliver his son. And his eyes flashed through tears, while, with the arm that was free, he appealed to Heaven crying:—

“The God of my fathers in whom I have learned to trust watches over the faithful!—Do you see the sand over there at the head of the bay, the seaweed and the shells? Only an hour ago that was covered by water, foaming waves were dancing over the spot. That, boy, is the way deliverance lies; if this wind holds, the tide will ebb further still, so the Phœnician seamen assure us. Their god of the north wind, they say, is favourable to us, and their youths have lighted a fire to the God up there on the heights of Baal-Zephon. But we know that it is another God who hath opened a way for us into the desert. We were in sore straits, my son.”

“Yes, Grandfather,” cried the boy. “You were as a lion in a pitfall, and the Egyptian host is mighty and unconquerable; every man of that host have I seen march past from the first even to the last. I

flew as fast as my feet might bear me to tell you all how many heavy troops, archers, horses and chariots—”

“We know it, we know it!” interrupted the old man. “But here we are!” and he pointed to a tent completely blown in which some serving men were endeavouring to prop up, and close to it sat a very old Hebrew in a litter, Elishama, the father of Nun, wrapped in many robes.

Nun eagerly spoke a few words to him and led Ephraim forward. And then, while the lad fell on his great-grandfather’s neck to be caressed and embraced, Nun spoke with quite youthful spirit to the herdsmen and servants:—

“Let the tent fall, men! The storm has only done your task for you! Wrap the canvas about the poles, load the carts and beasts. Hasten now, you Gad, Samma, Jacob; help the others. The hour of our departing is at hand. Each man make haste to harness the beasts, saddle and load the asses with all speed. The Lord hath opened a way for us. In the name of the Lord, and by the commands of Moses, each must make ready for departing. Every man keep to the old order. We march first at the head of the host; then come the other

tribes, and after them the strangers; last of all the lepers and unclean. Rejoice all ye people, for our God is working a great wonder and making the sea dry land for us, his chosen people. Give thanks to Him while you labour, and entreat Him from the bottom of your hearts, that He will ever protect us. He who would not perish at the edge of the sword or be crushed under the wheels of Pharaoh's chariots, let him put forth his strength and forget to rest. We shall find rest as soon as we have escaped from this peril. Give me the tent cloth; I will roll it up myself. And do your part, boy. See the children of Manasseh yonder, they are packing and loading! Well done, Ephraim, you know how to use your hands! But there is yet much to be done. And my old head forgets. So much has come upon me at once!—Here, Raphu, you have swift legs; I took it upon me to give warning in the camp of the strangers. Hasten to them and bid them speed their departing, that they be not too far behind the people of Israel. Time is precious! O Lord our God, shelter thy people with thy protecting hand and drive the waters further and further back with the storm which is thy mighty breath!—The Almighty and All-knowing God, who sees into our hearts, shall hear——That is too heavy a burthen for you, Ephraim,

you will hurt yourself—No! the boy is a strong boy. Do as he does, and ye of Succoth, rejoice in the strength of your young master!”

The last words were addressed to Ephraim's shepherds, serving-men and women, most of whom had greeted him in the midst of their toil, had kissed his hand or his arm, and been glad at his home-coming. They were packing and loading, folding and fitting, and getting the beasts together which had been scared by the storm, with many blows and much outcry.

The men of Succoth were zealous to imitate their young master, those from Tanis to serve their master's grandson; the other herd-owners and humbler folk of the tribe of Ephraim, whose tents had clustered round that of Nun, their Elder, were all no less eager; and yet it was some hours before all the tents, the house-gear and the victuals for man and beast had found a place in the carts or on the beasts of burden, and the old, the sick, and the feeble were laid in litters and chariots once more.

The wild wind now and then brought up the sound of Moses' deep voice, or Aaron's lighter tones, to the spot where the Ephraimites were busy. Neither they nor the sons of Judah needed this to spur them; for Hur and Nahshon commanded these

last, and by the side of Hur stood Miriam, his newly wedded wife. With the other tribes and the strangers it was otherwise; and the stiff-necked and cowardly conduct of their leaders had resulted in much misery and confusion.

CHAPTER V.

It had been found to be impossible to break through the frontier lines of Etham and follow the nearest road to Palestine in a north-easterly direction; and the second plan proposed by Moses—that they should march round Migdol of the South, had likewise failed, for spies had reported that the garrison there had been strongly reinforced. Hereupon the multitude had assembled round the man of God and had declared that sooner would they return home with all their families, and appeal to Pharaoh's mercy, than suffer themselves, their wives and their children, to be butchered.

For many days it had been necessary to keep them back, but when fresh messengers brought word that Pharaoh was coming down on them with a mighty host, the time seemed to be at hand when the Hebrews, who were now in the greatest peril, must be urged to force their way onward. Moses had exerted the full weight of his commanding individuality, and Aaron all the powers of his per-

suasive eloquence, while old Nun and Hur had striven to infuse some of their own fiery spirit into the rest. But the terrifying tidings had broken the last remnant of courage and faith in most of the people, and they had already determined to send word to Pharaoh of their repentance; but the messenger whom they had despatched turned back declaring that the approaching army had orders not to spare a single Hebrew, but to teach even those who should pray for mercy, at the point of the sword, how Pharaoh would punish those who, by their magic arts, had brought death and misery on so many Egyptians. Thus had they learned too late that their return would lead them to destruction no less surely than a bold advance. But when, on this, the fighting men, led by Hur and Nun, had proceeded almost as far as Migdol of the South, they had turned and fled at the loud blast of the Egyptian trumpets; and by the time they returned to the camp, weary, dispirited and wroth, fresh and exaggerated reports of the might of Pharaoh's host had been brought to the Hebrews, and mortal fear and despair had fallen on even the bravest. Exhortation was cast to the winds; threats were laughed to scorn; and the rebellious multitude had forced their leaders onward till they had reached the shores

of the Red Sea, and its deep green waters compelled them to give up all further flight to the southward. So the people had encamped between Pihahiroth and Baal-Zephon, and here, once more, their chief had called upon them in the name of the God of their fathers. In the face of certain destruction, from which no human power could save them, they had been brought to lift their eyes to Heaven again; and in the soul of Moses pity and sympathy had revived more strongly for the hapless and much tried people who had come forth at his bidding. During the past night he had gone up into the mountain of Baal-Zephon, and there, amid the roaring of the storm and hissing flame of the lightning, he had sought and found communion with the Lord. And he had not wearied of laying before Him the evil plight of His people and beseeching Him to deliver them.

In that same hour had Miriam, the wife of Hur, gone down to the seashore to entreat the Lord likewise under a solitary palm-tree, for still she felt herself His chosen handmaid. She besought Him for the women and children, whose trust in Him had brought them to this pass. And she would fain have prayed for the friend of her youth who was now pining in fearful captivity; but as she fell on her

knees she could only say in a subdued and broken voice:

“Forget not Thou Hosea, whom I at thy word named Joshua, albeit he hath been less obedient to thy call than Moses my brother or Hur my husband! Forget not either young Ephraim, the grandson of thy faithful servant Nun.”

Then she went back to her husband’s tent, a chief’s tent, while many a humbler man, and many a poor terrified woman of the people, outside their wretched shelter or lying on a thin mat wet with tears, uplifted an anxious heart to the God of their fathers and commended to His care those whom they loved best. Thus, in this night of sorest need, the camp was a temple, in which high and low, chief and mother, master and slave, nay, even the afflicted leper, sought and found the Lord.

At last the morning had dawned when Ephraim had shouted his child-like prayer down the storm, and the sea was beginning to retire.

Then, when they beheld with their own eyes the miracle which the Most High had wrought for his chosen people, the most despairing and fearful became so many glad and hopeful believers. Not among the sons of Ephraim only, but among all the tribes, nay, and among the strangers and unclean,

their newly awakened and joyful confidence moved each one to prepare with all his strength for future journeying, and for the first time the multitude assembled without strife or jealousy, without fighting, curses and tears.

After sunset, Moses, staff in hand, and Aaron, singing and praying, led the way to the head of the gulf. The storm, which was raging as wildly as ever, had swept back the waters, and bore down the flames and smoke of the torches which were carried at the head of each tribe, from north east to south west.

Next to the two great leaders, on whom every eye was fixed with eager anticipation, Nun marched with the children of Ephraim. The sea-bottom on which they trod was firm, damp sand, on which even the cattle could safely cross as on a smooth highway, gently sloping towards the sea. Ephraim, who was regarded by his elders as the future head of his tribe, had, by his grandfather's desire, undertaken to be careful that the train of men and beasts should not come to a standstill, and to this end he had been entrusted with a chief's staff. The fishermen who dwelt in the huts which clustered at the foot of Baal-Zephon agreed with the Phœnician seamen in saying that, as soon as the moon had reached the

zenith, the waters would rise again to their old place, so no delay could be allowed. The lad gloried in the storm, and as his hair blew about his face, and he fought against the wind while he hurried to and fro in fulfilment of his task, this felt to him as a foretaste of the great enterprise he had in his mind.

Thus matters sped through the darkness which quickly followed on the twilight. The strong smell of the seaweed and fish left on dry land was pleasanter to the youth, who now felt himself a man indeed, than the sweet perfume of nard in Kasana's tent. Once the thought of her flashed through his mind; but indeed, during these times, he had had no time to think of her. His hands were quite full; here the seaweed must be cleared aside which a wave had left in the way; there the ram of a flock which hesitated to set foot on the moist ground, must be seized by the horns and dragged forward, or the oxen and beasts of burthen driven through a pool they were shy of. Many times he had to lend a shoulder to lift a heavily laden cart of which the wheels had sunk in the soft sand, and when, just as they were starting on this strange and momentous journey, even on the Egyptian shore, a dispute arose between two herdsmen as to which should have the lead, he promptly settled by lot which was to go

forward and which to follow. Two little girls were crying and refusing to cross a pool, while their mother's arms were occupied with her infant; he picked them up with swift decision and carried them across the shallow lakelet; and when a wheel came off one of the waggons, he immediately had it dragged out of the way, and by the light of the torches he made some of the serfs who were least heavily laden carry each a sack or a bale, nay and even pieces of the broken vehicle. He had comforting words for weeping women and children, and if the flare of a torch showed him the face of some youth of his own age, whose aid he hoped to secure for liberating Joshua, he hinted to him in a few spirited words that he had a bold deed in prospect which he purposed to achieve with the help of his friend.

The incense bearers, who had hitherto led the way, on this occasion closed the march, for the wind blowing from the north east would have driven the smoke in the face of the people. They stood on the Egyptian shore, and soon all the multitude had passed them by, excepting only the strangers and the lepers who came last of all. The foreigners were indeed a motley host, consisting of Asiatics of Semitic blood, who were fleeing from the forced

labour and cruel punishments which were inflicted on them by the law of Egypt; of dealers, who had found buyers for their wares among the thousands of wanderers; and even of Shasoo shepherds who had been hindered from crossing the frontier on their return home. With these Ephraim had much trouble, for they refused to leave the dry land until the lepers had been enjoined to remain at a greater distance from them; but even they were brought to submission by Ephraim with the help of the chief of the tribe of Benjamin, which marched last in front of them; for he warned them of the prophecy of the Phœnicians and fishermen, that the moon as it sank would bring the sea back to its old bed. Finally he persuaded the leader of the lepers, an intelligent Egyptian who had been a priest, to maintain at least half the distance that was demanded.

Meanwhile the tempest continued to rage with increasing fury; the roar and long-drawn shrieks of the wind, mingling with the thunder of the breakers and the duller moan of the surf, drowned the shouts of command, the wailing of the women, the bellowing and bleating of the trembling beasts and the whining of the dogs. Ephraim's voice was audible only to those nearest to him; many torches were extinguished and the rest kept alight with difficulty.

At length, when for some short space he had been walking behind the last of the lepers, going slowly to recover his breath and get a little rest, he heard his name called from the rear, and turning round beheld an old playmate who was returning from spying the enemy, and who, seeing the leader's staff in the lad's hand, shouted in his ear with panting gasps that Pharaoh's chariots were coming on in the rear of the Egyptian host. He had left them by Pihahiroth, and if they had not waited to let the other troops come up with them, they might at any moment overtake the fugitives. Thereupon he again pressed on to reach the leaders of the multitude. But Ephraim stood still a moment in the middle of the way, with his hand held to his brow; and great anxiety came down on his soul. He knew full well that the approaching army would overrun the women and children whom he had just seen in all their pathetic terror and helplessness, as a man treads down a file of ants; and again all his impulses urged him to prayer and from the depths of his oppressed heart the imploring cry went up into the night:

"Eli! Eli! great God on High! Thou knowest, for I have told thee, and Thine all-seeing eye must behold in spite of the blackness of the night, how

sorely Thy people are beset whom thou hast promised to lead into a new land. Remember Thy word, O Jehovah! Be gracious unto us, God Almighty! Our foe is upon us with irresistible might! stay his steps! Save us! Deliver the women and the children! Save us and be merciful to us!"

As he prayed he had fixed his eyes on high and had espied the ruddy blaze of a fire on Baal-Zephon. This had been lighted by the Phoenicians to propitiate the Baal of the northwind in favour of the kindred race of Hebrews, and against the hated Egyptian nation.

This was friendly; but he put his trust in another God, and as he glanced again at the vaults of Heaven over which the black rack raced and gathered and divided again, and swept to and fro, he descried, between the parting clouds, the silver beam of the full moon already at its meridian. And fresh terror came upon him, for he remembered the predictions of the weather-wise seamen. If the flood should at this moment return to its bed, his people were doomed, for to the north of the gulf, where deep pools lay amid rocks and slimy mud there was no escape. If, within an hour, the waters should rise, the seed of Abraham would cease from the

face of the earth as writing on a wax tablet vanishes at the pressure of a warm hand.

But was not this people, doomed to destruction, the same which the Lord had called to be His own? And could He give them into the hand of the enemy which was His enemy also?

No! a thousand times no!

And the moon which was to cause the disaster had but a short time since aided his flight and been his friend. He could only hope and believe, and cling to his trust in God.

And as yet nothing was lost, not a single soul. If it came to the worst, the whole nation would not be destroyed; his own tribe which led the way, least of all; by this time many must have reached the further shore, more, probably, than he thought; for the little bay was narrow, and even the lepers, the last of the multitude, had already gone some distance over the moist sand.

He lingered behind everyone to listen for the coming of the enemy's chariots. On the shore of the gulf he laid his ear to the ground; and he could trust the sharpness of his hearing, for in this attitude he had often detected the distant tramp of beasts that had gone astray, or, when out hunting, had

heard the approach of a herd of antelopes or gazelles.

He, being the last, was in the greatest danger, but what matter for that? How gladly would he have given his young life to save the rest!

Since he had carried a chief's staff he felt that he had taken upon himself the duty of watching over his people; so he listened and listened, till at last he perceived a scarce audible thrill in the earth and then a faint rumbling. This was the foe; this must be Pharaoh's chariots; and how swiftly were the proud steeds rushing on!

He started to his feet as though a whip had stung him, and flew onward to overtake the rest.

How oppressively sultry the air had become, in spite of the raging gale which had extinguished so many of the torches! The clouds hid the moon, but the dancing fire on the highest peak of Baal-Zephon shone broader and brighter. The sparks which it cast up flew scurrying to westward, for the wind was veering to the east. No sooner did he perceive this than he hastened back to the youths who carried the censers behind the procession, and commanded them, in breathless haste, to refill the copper vessels, and take care that the vapour rose thick; for he

said to himself that the wind would blow it into the faces of the horses and make them refractory or stop them. No means seemed to him too humble, every moment gained was precious, and as soon as he had seen that the smoke from the censers was spreading in choking clouds over the track left by the advancing multitude, he ran on again, warning the elders as he came up with them that Pharaoh's chariots were not far behind, and that the people must hasten their march. Forthwith the host on foot, the bearers, leaders and herdsmen, collected their strength to proceed faster, and although the wind was every moment more decidedly against them, hindering their progress, they battled with it valiantly, and the fear of their pursuers doubled their energies.

The lad was like a sheep-dog watching and driving the flock, and the chiefs of the tribes looked kindly on him wherever he was to be seen; and as he made his way among the marching host, fighting onwards against the blast, the east wind brought a strange cry to his ears as the reward of his efforts. The nearer he came to it the louder it rose, and the more sure he was that it was a shout of triumph and gladness, the first that had been raised by Hebrew voices for many a long day. It revived the

youth like a cool draught after long thirst, and he could not refrain from shouting aloud and hailing those behind with a cry of "Saved! Saved!"

Several of the tribes had already reached the eastern shore of the gulf; it was they who sent up the shout of joy which, with the beacon fires they lighted along the shore, gave the rear of the host fresh courage and renewed their flagging strength. By the light of the blaze he saw the majestic figure of Moses on a hillock by the shore, stretching out his staff towards the waters; and this image was stamped on his mind as on that of every soul present, great and small, more deeply than any other, and inflamed the confidence in his heart. This man was verily the friend of God, and so long as he should hold up his staff the waves were spell-bound, and the Lord by his servant forbade them to return!

Ephraim need no more appeal to the Most High; this was in the hands of His great and sublime servant. But his own lesser duty of urging on one and another to the goal, he still must fulfil.

Back he flew to the lepers and the incense bearers, and to each division he shouted aloud "Saved! Saved! Hasten forward! The rod of Moses holds the waters back! Many have reached the

shore! Praise the Lord! Forward! forward! and you too may join the song! Fix your eyes on those two red fires! They were kindled by those who are delivered; between them stands the servant of the Lord uplifting his staff."

Then he again laid his ear to the ground, kneeling on the wet sand, and he heard quite near the rattle of wheels and the heavy tramp of horses. But even while he listened the sound gradually ceased, and he heard nothing but the howling of the storm and the ominous beating of the wild waves, or a cry now and then borne down on the east wind.

The chariots had reached the shore of the dry bed of the gulf, and paused some little while, hesitating before they started on so perilous a passage; then suddenly the Egyptian war cry rang out, and again he heard the rolling wheels. It came on more slowly than before, but yet faster than the Israelites could march.

For the Egyptians too the way lay open; but, though his people had but a small start, he need no longer fear for them; all was not lost; those who had reached the shore could scatter themselves during the night among the mountain solitudes, and ensconce themselves in spots where no chariot could

pursue them. Moses knew the land in which he had long dwelt as a fugitive. The only thing was to warn him of the approach of the foe. So he charged a comrade of the tribe of Benjamin with the message, for the distance was no longer very great, while he staid behind to watch the coming of the host. Without stooping to listen, and in spite of the gale which blew the sound from him, he could already hear the clatter of the chariots and neighing of the horses. The lepers, however, who likewise heard the noise, bewailed and wept, fancying themselves already trodden under foot or swallowed by the cold dark waters; for the way was fast shrinking, and the sea was greedy to recover the ground it had abandoned. Man and beast were forced to march in a narrower file, and while the hurrying troops packed closer and closer they also stretched out longer, and precious moments were lost. Those who walked on the right hand side were wading through the encroaching waves, in haste and terror, for already behind them they could hear in the distance the Egyptian words of command.

But the enemy was evidently delayed, and Ephraim easily understood what caused their diminished speed. The ground grew softer at every

step, and the narrow wheels of the war-chariots must sink deep in it, even to the axles.

Under cover of the darkness he crept back as near as he dared to the pursuing host, and he could hear now an oath and now an angry order to use the lash more freely; and at last one driver saying to his neighbour:

“What cursed folly! If they had suffered us to set out before noon instead of waiting till the omens had been read and Annas solemnly installed in the place of Baie, it would have been an easy matter enough, and we should have trapped them like a covey of quails. The High Priest has shown his valour on the field before this, and now he gives up the leadership because a dying woman has touched his heart!”

“Siptah’s Mother!” another put in. “Still you are right; twenty princesses ought not to have turned him away from his duty to us. If he had staid by us we should not have had to flay our jades alive, and at an hour too when any prudent Captain leaves his men to rest by the camp-fires over their supper and their game of draughts.—Go to the horses’ heads, man! we are sunk in the sand again!”

Thereupon a loud outcry arose behind the fore-

most chariot, and Ephraim could hear another voice exclaiming:

“Get on there, if the horses die for it!”

“If retreat were possible,” said the chief Captain of the war chariots, a relative of Pharaoh’s, “even now I would turn about. But as it is we should all tumble over each other. Go forward, cost what it may. We are close on their heels—Halt! Halt! Curses on that pungent smoke! Ah! wait, only wait, you dogs! As soon as the road opens out a little we will get round you, and may the gods shorten my life by a day for every soul I leave alive;—Another torch out. I cannot see my hand before my face. A beggar’s stick would be more to the purpose than a commander’s staff.”

“And a gallows’ rope about our necks instead of a gold chain,” cried another. “If only the moon would come out! It was because the horoscope promised that it would shine full from evening till dawn that I voted for the late march, turning night into day. If only it were not so dark I——”

But the sentence remained unfinished, for a blast, rushing down from the south eastern gorges of Baal-Zephon like a roaring beast of prey, swept over the speakers, and a rolling wave wetted Ephraim through and through. He shook back his hair and

dried his eyes as he recovered his breath; but behind a loud cry of terror went up from the Egyptians, for the surge that had but drenched him had swept the foremost chariot into the sea. At this the lad began to be alarmed for his people, and he flew forward; but as he started a flash of lightning showed him the gulf, the mountain, and the shore. The thunder did not immediately follow, but the storm soon came nearer; the lightnings, instead of cutting zig-zag across the sky, flared in broad sheets through the darkness, and before they died out, the deafening crack of the thunder echoed among the bare crags of the mountain-cliffs and rolled in deep angry waves of sound to the shore and the head of the bay. Sea and land, man and beast, all was flooded with the dazzling glare each time the destroying clouds discharged their bolts; the surging waves and the air above them gleamed in sulphurous yellow, through which the lightning blazed as through an olive-tinted glass wall.

Now too Ephraim thought he discerned that the heaviest clouds were coming up from the south and not from the north; and presently, by the lightning's gleam, he saw that behind him here a refractory team were plunging into the waves, there one chariot was overturning another, and beyond these

again several were locked together to the destruction of the drivers and the men at arms, while they checked the progress of those which followed.

Still, on the whole, the enemy was advancing, and the space dividing the fugitives from the pursuers grew no wider. However, the confusion that prevailed among the Egyptians was by this time so great that the cries of terror of the fighting men and the encouraging shouts of the drivers waxed louder and louder, in the intervals between the maddening roar of the thunder. But, black as were the storm-clouds to the south, fiercely as the wind raged, the darkened heavens shed no water; and though the pilgrims were wet, it was not with rain, but with the splashing waves which dashed higher and higher every moment, washing up further and further over the dry sand in the bay. The path was narrowing, the passing of the multitude was at an end. The blaze of the heavens still guided the frightened rear to the hoped-for goal, reminding them that there stood Moses with the staff lent him by God. Every step brought them nearer.

Presently a shout of triumph proclaimed that the tribe of Benjamin had reached the shore, though they waded through the foaming fringe of waters for some little distance. It had cost them unheard-of

efforts to save the cattle from the rising tide, to drag on the loaded carts, and keep the flocks together; but now they all stood in safety on dry land. Only the strangers and lepers remained to be rescued. The lepers, indeed, had not flocks nor herds; but the strangers had many, and the storm so terrified the people, as well as the cattle, that they dared not plunge into the water, which was not ankle deep. Ephraim however reached the land and called to the herdsmen from the shore to follow where he had passed, and under his guidance they drove the herds forward. This was successful; the last man, and last herd of cattle reached the land of safety under the raving storm amid loud shouts of joy. The lepers were forced to wade through waves up to their knees and even to their girdles, and before they had landed the gates of Heaven were opened and the rain fell in torrents. But they too were safe; and though many a mother who had been carrying her little one in her arms or on her shoulder, fell on her knees on the shore, though many a hapless wretch who had been helping his sturdier fellow sufferers to drag a cart through the yielding sands, or wade through the surf with a litter on his back, felt his head throb with fever, still, they too had escaped destruction.

They were to await further orders beyond a grove of palms which stood on some rising ground about a group of wells not far from the shore. The tribes had gone further inland to proceed on their way at a given signal; this was to take them in a south-easterly direction, into the mountain, where the inhospitable rocks prohibited any pursuit by a regular army or war chariots.

Hur had gathered his men about him, and they stood armed with spears, slings, and short swords, ready to fall on the foe who might venture to set foot on land. Men and horses should be cut down, and the chariots piled into a high barrier so as to erect a difficult obstacle in the way of the pursuers. The beacons on the shore were so diligently fed and screened that neither the rain nor the blast could extinguish them. They were to light the herdsmen who were prepared to attack the chariot-men, and old Nun, Hur, and Ephraim stood at their head. But it was in vain that they waited for the pursuers, and when the youth was the first to see by the glare of the beacon-fires that the way by which the fugitives had come was now one with the broad level of the sea, and that the smoke was driving to the north instead of the south west,—it was about the hour of the first morning watch—a shout of

triumph burst from his breast overflowing with thankfulness and joy:

“Look at the flames! The wind has changed; the sea is being carried northwards! The waves have swallowed up Pharaoh’s host!”

At this there was silence for a while in the multitude, and then, suddenly, Nun’s loud voice was heard:

“He is right, my children; vain is the strength of man! O Lord God! How terrible and fearful are Thy judgments on Thy foes!”

Here he was interrupted by a loud outcry. Out by the wells, where Moses, greatly exhausted, was leaning against a palm tree with Aaron and many others about him, the fact which Ephraim had first discerned was now observed by the rest; the glad and terrible tidings, incredible but true, flew from mouth to mouth, and each minute confirmed their certainty. Every eye glanced skywards; the black clouds were steadily sailing away to the northward. The rain was ceasing; instead of the angry flashes and the roar of thunder, a few pale gleams lighted up the isthmus and the northern lakes, and to the south the sky was clearing. At last the low moon looked out between the banks of cloud; its peaceful rays silvered the tall flanks of Baal-Zephon and the

shores of the gulf, now bathed once more in dashing waves. The raving and shrieking blast sank to a murmuring breeze from the south, and the waters, which had been as a raging monster besieging the rocks, now lay quivering with broken strength at the stony base of the mountain.

The sea spread a shroud, dark for a time, over those hundreds of corpses; but the pale moon, ere it set, took care that the watery grave of a King and so many great personages should not lack a splendid pall. Its radiance poured down on the waves that hid them, decking them with a glorious embroidery of diamonds in silver setting.

Whilst the east grew bright and the sky was red with dawn the tents were pitched; yet there was little time for a hasty morsel. Shortly after sunrise the chief called the wandering people together, and as soon as they had assembled at the springs, Miriam swung the tambourine, shook the circle of bells and struck the calf-skin till they sounded far and wide, and as she paced forth with a light step, the women and maidens followed her, keeping rhythmical time with the dance; and she sang:

"I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea!

The Lord is my strength and song! and he is become my salvation; he is my God and I will prepare him an habitation;

My Fathers' God, and I will exalt him! Pharaoh's chariots and his host hath he cast into the sea—his chosen captains also are drowned in the Red Sea.

The depths have covered them; they sank into the bottom as a stone.

Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power. Thy right hand, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces the enemy.

And in the greatness of thine excellency thou hast overthrown them that rose up against thee; Thou sentest forth thy wrath which consumed them as stubble.

And with the blast of thy nostrils the waters were gathered together; the floods stood upright as an heap and the depths were congealed in the heart of the sea.

The enemy said I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; my lust shall be satisfied upon them; I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them.

Thou didst blow with thy wind, the sea covered them; they sank as lead in the mighty waters.

Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods?

Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?

Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed; thou hast guided them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation!"

Men and women alike joined in when she repeated the cry, "I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously, the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea."

This song and this solemn hour were never forgotten by the Israelites, and each one was full of his God and of glad, thankful hope for happier days.

CHAPTER VI.

THE song of praise had died away and the storm had long since ceased; yet the morning sky, which had been red at dawn, was again covered with grey clouds, and a strong wind still blew from the south-west, disturbing the lake and shaking and rocking the crowns of palms which stood by the wells.

The rescued people had extolled the Most High, and even the coldest and most perverse had joined in Miriam's hymn of praise; but as the procession of dancers approached the sea many would have gladly left the ranks and have hastened to the strand where many things attracted them.

Hundreds had now betaken themselves to the shore, where the waves, like generous robbers, disgorged and washed up on to the sand that which they had engulfed during the night.

Nor did even the women allow the wind to hinder them, for covetousness and revenge, the most

powerful instincts in the human breast, drew them to the shore.

Some new object appeared every moment to excite their greed; for here lay the corpse of a warrior, and there his overthrown chariot in the sand. From this, if it had been the possession of a great man, they tore the silver or golden ornaments; from the owner they took his short sword, or the battle axe out of his girdle, and men and women of the common class, the slaves and slave-women of the Hebrews and the strangers, robbed the bodies of their clasps and bracelets, which were of precious metal, or tore the rings from the swollen fingers of the drowned.

The ravens which had followed the wanderers, and which had disappeared during the storm, now returned, and were screeching and striving against the wind, at least to maintain a place above the booty, the scent of which had attracted them.

But far greedier than they were the dregs of the wandering host; and when the sea threw a costly article on shore a wild cry was raised, and hard blows exchanged. The leaders themselves kept back, for they considered that the Hebrews had a right to the spoil; and if one of them tried to prevent gross covetousness the people refused to obey him.

What the Egyptians had so lately brought upon them was so dreadful that it never entered the minds of the best of them to restrain their thirst for revenge. Many, even grey-bearded men of high position, and women and mothers whose appearance bespoke a kindly disposition, drove back the few unfortunates who had succeeded in reaching the strand on the wreckage of the war-chariots and baggage-waggons. With shepherds' crooks and travellers' staves, with knives and axes, or by throwing stones and with spiteful words they forced them to relax their hold on the floating wood; and the few who reached the land were driven by the furious mob back into the sea which had spared them in vain.

Their wrath was so great, and revenge such a sacred duty, that none dreamed of the respect, compassion and consideration due to misfortune; not a word was heard that could hint of magnanimity or pity, or even of the profit that might be gained by saving the rescued to be slaves, or as prisoners of war to be ransomed.

"Death to the arch-enemy!" "Destruction fall on them!" "Away with them!" "You drove us and our children into the sea, away with you into the salt waves!" "Give them as food to the fishes!"

These were the cries that were raised on every side and which no one checked, not even Miriam and Ephraim, who likewise had gone down to the shore to witness the tragedy that was being enacted there. Though the maiden was now the wife of Hur, her demeanour and character had been very little altered by her marriage. The fate of her people and her relations with her God—whose prophetess she felt she was, were still her highest thought; and now that all she had hoped and prayed for was being fulfilled, now that she had given expression to the feelings of the faithful in song, marching in front of the thankful multitude, she considered she had attained the summit of her existence.

Ephraim first had reminded her of Hosea, and while she spoke with him of the prisoner she walked proudly along like a queen, and answered the greetings of the people with majestic dignity. Her eyes sparkled with happiness, and her face wore only for a few minutes an expression of pity when the youth told her of the hardships he had endured with his uncle. Of course she still remembered the man she had loved, but he was no longer essential to the high aim of her life.

Ephraim had just mentioned the lovely Egyptian

woman who loved his uncle, and at whose petition the chains had been taken off the prisoners, when a loud cry was raised at a part of the shore where a great crowd had collected.

Howls of rage and cries of joy went up together, obviously caused by the fact that the sea had thrown up something particularly valuable. Curiosity attracted them both to the spot; and as Miriam's proud dignity caused the people to stand aside, she soon caught sight of the body of a traveling chariot which had lost its wheels, and of its pitiable contents. The linen canopy which had screened it was torn away, and lying on its floor were two elderly Egyptian women; a third much younger, lay against the back seat of the singular vehicle which had thus become a boat. The first two lay dead in the water that covered the bottom of the carriage, and several Hebrew women were in the act of tearing off the costly ornaments from the throat and arms of one of them. The younger woman had escaped death by a wonderful chance, and now she was offering her very precious jewels to the Hebrew women. At the same time with pale quivering lips and slender, half-benumbed hands, she was promising the robbers, in a soft harmonious voice, to give them all she had and a handsome reward in

money as well, if they would but spare her life. She was still so young, and she had been kind, very kind to a Hebrew;—if they would but hear her. This petition sounded appealing, though it was interrupted so frequently with curses and groans that little of it was audible. Just as Miriam and Ephraim reached the shore she screamed aloud, for a brutal woman tore the gold snake from her ear. The Egyptian girl's cry of anguish struck the youth like a sword thrust, and the colour left his face as he recognised Kasana's voice.

The corpses by her side were those of her nurse and of Baie's wife.

Ephraim, almost beside himself, thrust aside the men who separated him from their victim and hastened towards the remains of the chariot; sprang on to the sand-bank at the foot of which the vehicle was stranded, and cried with burning cheeks and impetuous passion:

“Back! Woe to those who touch her!”

But a Hebrew woman, the wife of a brickmaker whose child had died of frightful convulsions on the journey through the sea, had already snatched the dagger from Kasana's girdle, and had stabbed her in the back, with the cry:

“That is for my little Ruth, wretch!”

She raised the bloody poniard for a second blow; but before she could strike her enemy again, Ephraim rushed between them and wrenched away the knife. Then, standing in front of the hapless creature, he shouted in loud menace:

“Murderers and thieves! If one of you dares to touch her, his blood shall mingle with that of this woman!”

With these words he fell on his knees by the side of the bleeding victim, and, finding that she had lost consciousness, he lifted her in his arms and carried her to Miriam.

The startled plunderers for a few minutes suffered him to do as he would, but before he had gained his end, a cry was raised of:—“Vengeance! Vengeance! We found the woman, and the booty is ours alone!” “How dare the insolent Ephraimite call us robbers and murderers?” “When there is a chance of shedding Egyptian blood it shall flow!” “The Lord our God spares not, nor do we!”—“Seize him!” “Seize the girl!”

But the lad paid no heed to this outbreak of rage till Kasana's head was resting on Miriam's bosom where she was sitting on a sandhill near at hand; and then, as the angry crowd rushed upon

him, the women outstripping the men, he once more flourished his dagger crying:—

“Back! Hold off, I tell you once more. If there are any men here of Ephraim or Judah let them come to my side or to Miriam’s, the wife of their chief;—Well done my brethren! and woe to him who lays a hand on her; Vengeance, do you say? Are you not avenged by that hyæna who has murdered this poor defenceless creature? Your victim’s jewels?—Well, well, they are yours, and I will give you my own into the bargain so long as you leave the wife of Hur to care for the dying woman!”

He bent over Kasana, took from her person all she had about her of pins and rings, and placed them in the greedy hands stretched out to receive them. Then he took the broad gold band from his own arm, held it up and cried:

“This is the promised ransom. Go back quietly and leave this woman to Miriam, and you shall have it to share among you. If you insist on blood, come on,—but then I keep the bracelet!”

These words did not fail of their effect. The angry women looked first at the heavy, broad gold band, and then at the splendid youth and the men of Judah and Ephraim who had rallied round him;

and then gazed enquiringly at each other. At last the wife of a foreign trader cried out:

“Give us the gold and we will leave the wounded darling to the chief’s son.”

The rest agreed to this decision, although the brickmaker’s furious wife, who meant to have done a deed pleasing in the eyes of her God by avenging her child, and had in consequence been branded as a murderess, still threatened Ephraim with frenzied gestures, till she was dragged away to the shore by the crowd who hoped to find fresh plunder there.

Through all the tumult Miriam, without a qualm of fear, had examined and bound up Kasana’s wounds with a skilful hand. The dagger, a gift in jest from Prince Siptah, that his fair one might not go forth to battle unarmed, had inflicted a deep stab under one shoulder, and she had lost so much blood that the feeble flicker of life seemed ready to die out at every breath. But she still lived, and she was carried into Nun’s tent as being the nearest at hand.

The old chief had just been giving out weapons to the herdsmen and youths gathered together by his grandson to go forth to liberate his beloved son, and had himself promised to join the expedition, when the melancholy party reached the tent. If

Kasana had admired the noble old man, so had Nun felt very kindly towards Hornecht's lovely daughter in the bygone years at Tanis. They had never met without her giving him some pretty greeting and he would reply to her: "The Lord bless thee my child," or "A happy day for an old man when he meets so sweet a maid."

Many years ago, while she still wore the curls of a very young girl, he had even given her a lamb with especially silky snow-white wool, after he had concluded a bargain with her father, exchanging some corn from Hornecht's land for steers of his own famous breed. And all his son had ever told him of Kasana had tended to enhance his regard for her. She seemed in his eyes the most loveable of all the maidens of Tanis, and if she had been the child of Hebrew parents it would have rejoiced him to see her married to his son.

To find his favourite again in so pitiable plight was so great a grief to the old man that the tears ran down on his snowy beard, and his voice shook when he saw the blood-stained bandage about her shoulder. As soon as she was laid on his couch, and Nun had placed his medicine chest at the prophetess's service, Miriam desired the men to leave her alone with the sufferer; and when she

called them back into the tent she had revived Kasana with some drug, and bound her wound with greater care. With her hair smoothly arranged and the blood all washed away, she lay between the fresh linen sheets like a sleeping child, hardly looking as if she had attained womanhood. And she still breathed, though the blood had not returned to her lips or cheeks, nor was it till she had again swallowed the mixture which Miriam had prepared for her that she opened her eyes.

At the foot of the bed stood the old man and his grandson, and each would fain have asked the other how it came to pass that he could not restrain his tears as he looked into the face of the stranger.

The conviction which Ephraim had so unexpectedly gained that Kasana was base and falsehearted, had revolted him and frightened him back into the right way which he had left. Nevertheless, he had kept all he had overheard in the tent locked in his own breast, and when he had told his grandfather and Miriam that Kasana had interceded kindly for the prisoners, and both had desired to learn more from him, he had felt as a father might who had witnessed the crime of a beloved son, and not a word of the horrors he had heard passed his lips. Now, he was glad he had kept silence; for in spite

of all he had seen and heard, this pure and lovely creature was surely incapable of anything dishonourable.

Old Nun had never ceased to think of her as the sweet child he had known so well, the delight of his eye and joy of his heart. He looked down on the quivering features with tender pity, and when at length she opened her eyes, he smiled at her with fatherly affection. The light in her eyes showed that she too at once recognised him and Ephraim, but when she tried to nod her head to them she was too weak. Still, her expressive face confessed her surprise and pleasure; and when Miriam for the third time offered her the draught and moistened her brow with some strong essence, she looked from one to another with her large eyes, and seeing their anxious gaze she was able to say in a low voice:

"This wound aches so, and death—Shall I die?" They glanced enquiringly at each other, and the men would very gladly have concealed the dreadful truth, but she went on:

"Oh, let me know; tell me the truth, I pray you!"

And Miriam, who was kneeling on the ground by her side, found courage to reply:

"Yes, poor young thing, the wound is deep; but all my art may do to save you shall be done, to preserve your life as long as possible."

The words were spoken kindly and compassionately, and yet the prophetess's deep voice seemed to jar on Kasana's ear; her lips curled pitifully while Miriam spoke, and when she ceased, the sufferer closed her eyes and large tears flowed down her cheeks.

Deep and anxious stillness reigned, till she opened her eyes once more, and fixing them sadly on Miriam's face, asked, as if in amazement at something strange:

"You, a woman, are learned in the leech's art?" To which Miriam replied:

"My God hath bidden me to care for the sufferers among my people."

At this the dying woman's eyes sparkled uneasily, and she exclaimed in a stronger voice, indeed with a vigour which surprised her hearers:

"You are Miriam, the woman who sent for Hosea to go to her;" and when Miriam replied unhesitatingly and simply:

"As you say," Kasana went on:

"And you are indeed of great and majestic beauty, and must be capable of great things!—He

obeyed your call—and you—you could nevertheless marry another?”

And again the prophetess answered, but in a gloomier tone:

“As you say.”

Then the dying woman closed her eyes again, and a strange, covert smile parted her lips.

But this was not for long; she became uneasy and restless. The fingers of her little hands, her lips, even her eyebrows, were never still, and her smooth, narrow brow was furrowed as though she had something weighing on her brain. At length the trouble which disturbed her peace found utterance and she said in quavering accents:

“You are Ephraim, whom he loved as a son, and you are Nun, the old man his father. There you stand, and you will live, while I—— Oh and it is so hard to leave the light of day— Anubis will lead me before the judgment seat of Osiris; my heart will be weighed, and then——” She shuddered violently, opening and closing her trembling hands; but she soon recovered herself, and began to speak once more. But Miriam positively forbade her, as it must hasten the end.

At this Kasana collected all her strength and

exclaimed quickly and as loudly as she could, glancing at Miriam from top to toe:—

“So you would hinder me from doing what I must do? You?!”

There was an accent of contempt in her tone; but she no doubt felt that she must husband her strength, for she went on more calmly, and as if speaking to herself:—

“But I cannot depart thus—not thus! How it happened, why I did it all—I must confess—and I will not complain if only he may know how it came to pass.—O Nun, good old Nun, who gave me a lamb when I was yet but a child—I loved it so—and you, Ephraim, my boy, I will tell you everything.”

A painful cough here checked her utterance; as soon as she had recovered her breath she turned to Miriam again, and went on, in a voice so full of bitter aversion that it startled those who knew her kindly nature:—

“It is you—you tall woman, with a man’s voice and the learning of a leech—you who beguiled him from Tanis and from me. He went and came and did your bidding. And you—you became another man’s wife—it must have been after his coming; yes—for when Ephraim brought your message he

spoke of you as a maiden. Whether it was a grief to Hosea I know not— But another thing I know, and that is that I have somewhat to confess before it is too late—and none may hear it but those who love him, and I—do you hear?—I love him more than all else on earth!—You! you have a husband, and a God whose bidding you zealously obey—as you yourself have said. What is Hosea to you? I beg you to leave us. Very few have I met in my life to whom I could not feel kindly, but you I—I cannot love, I know not why,—and if you remain near me I cannot speak!—But before you go—you are a physician—tell me one thing; I have so many things to say to him before I die—will it kill me if I speak?”

And again the prophetess found no reply but a brief: “As you say,” and her tone was one of stern warning.

Hesitating between the duty she owed to the sufferer as her physician, and her desire not to contravene the wishes of a dying creature, she glanced at old Nun, and reading in his face a command to yield to Kasana’s wish, she bent her head and quitted the tent. But as she stood outside, the poor soul’s bitter words came home to her and spoilt the day that had begun so gloriously,

aye, and many an hour after; and, to the last she could never explain to herself how it was that in the presence of that hapless dying woman a feeling had possessed her that she was the smaller, the inferior creature.

As soon as Kasana found herself alone with the grandfather and grandson, and Ephraim had fallen on his knees by the bedside while the old man, after kissing her brow, stood with his hoary head bent to hear her low tones, she began again:—

“Now I am easier. That tall woman—her knit black brows—her eyes as dark as night—they are fiery indeed, and yet so cold—that woman— Did Hosea love her, Father? Tell me, I do not ask out of idle curiosity.”

“He honoured her,” replied the old man in some trouble, “as do all our people. She is of a lofty spirit and our God vouchsafes to her to hear His voice.—But you, sweet one, were dear to him even as a child; that I know.”

A slight shudder ran through her frame. For a short space she closed her eyes and a blissful smile lighted up her face. This lasted so long that Nun thought that death had already claimed her, and he leaned over her, listening to her breathing with the draught in his hand. She did not seem to see him;

but when at last she looked up again, she put out her hand for the cup, drank from it, and then went on:—

“I felt as though he were there before me—Hosea himself. He wore his warrior’s dress, as he did the first time he took me on his arm. I was but a little child, and I was afraid of him because he looked so grave, and my nurse had told me that he had slain many enemies. But I was happy when he came, and when he went away I was sad. And years went on, and my love for him grew as I grew. My young heart was so full of him, so full—— Yes, even when I was compelled to marry another, and after I was a widow.”

The last words were scarcely audible, and she rested a while before she went on:—

“Hosea knows it well—only he does not know how anxious I was when he was in the field, and how I longed for him till he came home again. At last, at last he returned, and how glad I was to see him once more!—But he himself! That woman—Ephraim told me—that tall proud woman bid him go to Pithom. Yet he came back from thence, and then, O then—that was hardest of all to bear—he refused my hand when my father offered it—that—

ah, how it hurt me! I can no more—give me the cup again.”

Her cheeks had coloured slightly as she made this painful confession; and the old man, perceiving how quickly the efforts she was making were bringing her to the end, begged her to be silent. But she insisted on making use of what little time remained to her, and though a piercing pain and tormenting cough forced her to press her hand to her bosom, she went on:—

“Then I hated him; but not for long; and I never loved him more than when I went after the hapless prisoner—you know, boy.—And then came the dreadful, horrible time; the shameful things—but he must know it all that he may not despise me if he ever hears.—I never knew my mother, and there was no one to warn me—— Where shall I begin? Prince Siptah—you know him, Father—the bad man who will soon be lord over Egypt. My father is in a plot with him—Great Gods! I can speak no more!”

Terror and despair were painted in her face; but Ephraim broke in, and confessed with tearful eyes and a trembling voice all he had overheard by the tent that night and she confirmed it with assenting glances. When at last he spoke of the High

Priest Baie's wife, whose body had been thrown up on the strand by Kasana's side, she interrupted him in a low voice, saying:—

“She devised it all. She wanted her husband to be supreme in the land and govern even Pharaoh; for Siptah is no King's son.”

“Aye,” said the old man, only anxious to stop her speaking and to help her to tell all she wished to make known, “and as Baie raised him up, so can he overturn him. He, even more surely than his predecessor, will be the tool of the men who have made him King. I know Aarsu the Syrian, and if I am not deceived the time is coming when he will aim at seizing the reins of power in Egypt, torn as it will be by internal divisions, though he and his mercenaries have so far helped others to snatch them. But you, child, what prompted you to follow the army and that profligate traitor?”

Kasana's eyes gleamed more brightly again, for the question led directly to the matter of which she desired to speak, and she replied as clearly as her failing strength allowed:—

“It was for your son's sake—for love of him—to procure his release. Only the evening before, I had refused positively to go with Baie's wife.—But when I had seen Hosea once more, by the well, and

he—ah! he was so kind at last, and kissed my brow!—and I saw him in misery—alas, poor heart! I saw the best of men doomed to perish in disgrace and sickness— And when he went onward with chains on his feet it suddenly struck me—”

“Then, brave, foolish, misguided child that you are, you determined to win the devotion of the future King in order to secure the release of your friend, my son?”

The dying woman smiled and said softly:

“Yes, yes; for that, and that alone. And I loathed the prince.—And the disgrace, the shame—horrible, horrible!”

“So it was for my son’s sake that you endured it all,” cried the old man, interrupting her, and her hand which he pressed to his lips was wet with his tears, while she turned to Ephraim and sighed:

“And I thought of this lad too. He is so young and the mines so terrible.”

Again she shuddered. The boy covered her hand with kisses, while she looked tenderly in his face and his grandfather’s, and added:—

“Now all is well, and if the gods grant him freedom—”

Here Ephraim broke in:—

“We are setting forth this very day for the

mines. I and my comrades, and my grandfather will drive his keepers to the four winds—”

“And he shall learn from my own lips,” said Nun, “how truly Kasana loved him, and his whole life will be too short to thank her for such a sacrifice.”

His voice failed him. But every trace of trouble had vanished from the dying woman’s face, and she lay for some time gazing upwards in silent contentment. But then, by degrees, an anxious frown came on her brow, and she softly gasped out:—

“It is well—yes, all is well—but yet one thing—my body, unembalmed—with no holy amulets—”

And here Nun again interrupted her, saying:—
“As soon as we have closed your eyes I will deliver it, safely wrapped, to the Phœnician seaman who is close at hand, that he may convey it to your father.”

She tried to turn her head to thank him with a loving glance; but suddenly she clutched at her throat with both hands, dark blood rose to her lips, a bright flame tinged her cheeks and faded to dead white, and after a short and painful struggle she sank back. Death had laid his hand on the loving heart, and her face wore the look of a child’s whose mother has forgiven it some fault, and kissed it before it fell asleep.

Nun closed her eyes, weeping as he did so; and Ephraim, deeply moved, kissed the drooping lids; and after a few moments' silence the old man said:—

“I trouble myself very little about the life beyond the grave, of which even Moses knows nothing; but one who lives as she has lived must always survive in the faithful memory of those whom she loved; and she has done her part, it seems to me, to attain immortality. We will dispose of her body according to our promise, and then set forth to prove to him for whom Kasana gave all she had to give, that we love him no less well than the Egyptian woman.”

CHAPTER VII.

THE prisoners were making their way but slowly to the mines. Never in all his experience had the leader of the gang known a worse journey through the desert, more luckless in every way, and so beset with mishaps and hindrances.

One of his "Moles," Ephraim to wit, had made his escape; he had lost one of his faithful hounds; and after his gang had been terrified and drenched by such a storm as scarcely befel once in five years in all that thirsty tract, another overtook them on the following day—the same in which Pharaoh and his host had perished—even more violent and persistent than the first. The tempest had stopped their march, and after this second deluge some of the prisoners and men had sickened with fever from sleeping on the wet ground in the open air. Even the Egyptian asses, unaccustomed to the rain, had suffered from the wetting, and the best had been left to die on the way.

At last they had been compelled to bury two of

their comrades in the sand, and three more were so ill that they must be mounted on the asses that were left; thus the prisoners were forced to carry the provisions with which the beasts had been laden. In all his twenty-five years experience such a thing had never before happened to their guide, and he looked forward to severe reproof at home.

All this had a bad effect on the man's temper, though he was commonly regarded as the most lenient of his tribe; and Joshua, as the accomplice of the audacious rascal whose escape was the beginning of all these vexations, was the chief victim of his wrath. Angry as he was, the leader of the gang might perhaps have dealt more mercifully with him if he had bewailed his lot like the man next behind him, or cursed as loudly as his companion in chains, who spent his breath in threats of a time coming when his sister-in-law would be in attendance on Pharaoh, and when she would find some way to punish the man who had ill treated her dear sister's husband.

But Hosea had made up his mind to take all the rough driver and his men could do him with as calm submission as the scorching sun, which had tortured him many a time ere this during his marches under arms across the desert; and his manly

spirit and strong will helped him to keep his resolution. When the driver loaded him with a monstrous burthen he collected all the strength of his powerful muscles and tottered forward under it without a rebellious word till his knees gave way; and then his tyrant would fly at him, snatch a few bales from off his shoulders, and declare he knew all the wickedness of his heart, and that all he hoped for was, that he might have to be left on the way and so bring his driver to further trouble; but he would not let his prisoners cheat him of their lives when hands were needed in the mines.

Once the man inflicted a deep wound; but he was immediately most anxiously careful that it should be healed, gave him wine to strengthen him, and delayed the caravan for half a day that he might rest.

He had not forgotten Prince Siptah's promise of a splendid reward to the man who should bring him news of this prisoner's death; but he was an honest man, and it was this very promise which prompted him to watch with special care over Joshua's life; for the consciousness of having neglected his duty for any personal profit would have spoiled his appetite for meat, drink and sleep, the three blessings he most prized. Hence, though

the Hebrew had much to suffer, it was not beyond endurance; and it was a real pleasure to be able to lighten the woes of his weaker comrades by exerting his own great strength.

He had resigned his fate to the God who had called him to serve Him; but this service, he knew, was something more than mere pious trust; and day and night his mind was set on flight. But the fetters which linked him to his fellow victim were so firmly rivetted and so carefully examined and hammered night and morning, that any attempt at escape must only have ended in more cruel misery.

The prisoners were conducted first across a hilly country and then towards a long range of mountains lying in front of them, till they reached a desert tract where weather-worn boulders of sand-stone stood up at intervals from the rocky ground.

On the fifth evening the gang stopped to rest by a lofty mountain which Nature seemed to have piled up out of flat layers of stone; and at sunrise, on the sixth morning, they turned off down a valley leading to the mines.

They had overtaken no one since, on the first day, they had come up with a messenger from the King's Treasury. They had, on the other hand, met

several small caravans, conveying malachite, turquoises and copper to Egypt, as well as the green glass manufactured in the neighbourhood of the mines.

Among a party whom they met at the opening of the gorge into which they diverged on this last day, were a married couple, on their way homeward, having been pardoned by the King. The driver pointed to them, to raise the spirits of his exhausted "moles", but the sight of them had quite an opposite effect; for the man's unkempt hair was already grey, though he was hardly past thirty, his tall figure bent and haggard, and his bare back striped with many scars and clotted blood, while his wife, who had shared his fate, had gone blind. She sat huddled on an ass in the brooding melancholy of mania; and although the prisoner gang as they marched past, loudly broke the silence of the desert, and her hearing was as sharp as ever, she paid no heed to them, but stared unmoved into vacancy.

The sight of these hapless wretches held up his own hideous fate as clearly as a mirror before Hosea's eyes; for the first time he groaned aloud, and clasped his hands over his face. This the driver noticed, and touched by the horror of a man

whose powers of endurance had till now seemed indomitable, he cried to him:

"But they do not all return like this; not indeed like this!"—"Because they are even more utterly wretched," he thought to himself. "But that poor fellow need not know that. Next time I come this way I will remember to ask for Hosea, for I shall be curious to know what will become of such a bull of a man. The strongest and most determined often are the quickest to perish."

At this he flourished his whip over the heads of his gang as if he were driving a team of horses, without touching them, however. Then he pointed to a cloud of smoke rising from behind a wall of rock on the right hand and said:—

"There are the smelting furnaces. We shall be in by midday. There is no lack of fires here to cook our lentils, and a bit of sheep's flesh into the bargain, for we are keeping the Kind God's birthday, the son of Ra. Long may he live! Hail and good health to him!"

For half an hour longer they toiled along the dry bed of a torrent, with high banks on each side; after the storm a roaring mountain stream had rushed down this gully to the lower ground, and

even now a few pools were exhaling their moisture. When the melancholy train had made their way round a steep shoulder of rock, on the top of which stood a small Egyptian temple to Hathor and a considerable number of grave-stones, they found themselves close to a bend in the ravine which led to the gorge where the mines lay.

Flags were waving from tall masts in front of the temple, in honour of Pharaoh's birth-day; and when presently a noise came up from the valley, usually so silent, of shouts, and tumult, and clatter, the driver expressed his opinion that the high festival was being kept by the prisoners with unwonted jollity, saying so to the other guards who had paused to listen.

So they moved forward without delay; but no man held up his drooping head, for the noon-day sun was so relentlessly cruel, and the sides of the ravine, dazzling with the glare, poured down such fierce heat that it seemed as though they were striving to out-do the smelting furnaces.

Though so near their journey's end the wanderers tottered forward as if in sleep, and one alone held his breath with excitement. As a war-horse harnessed to a plough arches his neck and dilates his nostrils,

while the fire sparkles in his eye, so had Joshua drawn up his stooping form in spite of the heavy sack across his shoulders, and his flashing gaze turned to the spot whence the uproar came which the driver supposed to be loud revelry. But he, Joshua, knew better. He could never mistake the sounds which he heard. It was the battle-cry of Egyptian troops, the trumpet-call to summon them to arms, the clatter of weapons and shouting of hostile parties.

Ready at once for swift action, he addressed his comrade in chains and whispered his commands. "The hour of release is at hand. Keep your eyes open, follow me blindly."

At this the other too was greatly excited, and no sooner had Hosea looked down the ravine than he said, "Now! Be ready!"

The first glance into the little gorge had revealed to him a figure standing on the top of a cliff, and a noble head framed in white hair. It was his father. He would have known him among ten thousand, and from a much greater distance. But he looked away from that beloved face for a moment to glance at the driver of the gang, who stood still, startled and speechless; and then, thinking that a mutiny had broken out among the State-prisoners, with

quick presence of mind he cried in harsh accents to his subordinates:—

“Get behind our prisoners and kill any one who attempts to escape.” But hardly had the men done his bidding and gone to the rear, when Hosea whispered to his companion: “Now, down with him!”

With these words the Hebrew, who, with his fellow captive, was at the head of the file, rushed on the driver, and Joshua had seized his right arm and the other man his left, before he was aware of it.

He was a stalwart fellow, and rage doubled his strength; he struggled wildly to free himself, but Joshua and his comrade held him in a grip of iron.

One glance had been enough to show the captive warrior which way he must go to reach his own people. He would have to pass a small force of Egyptian bowmen who were shooting their arrows at the Hebrews on the opposite side of the ravine; but the enemy would not dare to turn on them, for the sturdy form of the slave driver served to screen them both, and he was easily recognisable by his dress and weapons. “Hold up the chain with one hand,” said Joshua to his accomplice. “I can hold

our living shield. We must get up the shoulder of the hill crab-fashion."

His companion obeyed, and when they came within arrow-shot length of the foe they held their prisoner, first on one side and then walking backwards, between themselves and the Egyptians. Thus Joshua made his way, step by step, towards the Hebrew fighting men, shouting in ringing tones:—"The son of Nun is returning to his father and his people!"

None of the Egyptians who recognised the Captain of the prison-gang, had dared to let fly a shaft at the escaped prisoners; and now, from the top of the slope which the fettered couple were climbing backwards, Joshua heard his name called in joyful accents, and at the same moment Ephraim and his company of youthful combatants came flying down the hill to meet him.

To his astonishment the warrior saw in the hands of every son of his people a large shield as of an Egyptian foot-soldier, a sword, or a battle axe. But many still wore at their girdle the herdsman's sling and bag of pebbles.

Ephraim was their leader, and before he greeted his uncle, he ranged his men in two ranks like a

double wall between Hosea and the enemy's archers. Not till then did he give utterance to the joy of meeting; and another glad greeting followed his, for old Nun was safely led to the wall of rock under cover of those large Egyptian shields which the sea had cast on shore; and then, under shelter of the cliff, strong hands filed off the fetters which bound Joshua and his comrade, while Ephraim, aided by a few others, bound the driver captive. The unfortunate officer had given up all resistance and let them do what they would, passively resigned. Before they tied his hands behind his back he only begged to be allowed to wipe his eyes, for the tears were coursing each other down the stern man's cheeks and on to his grey beard; tears of vexation at finding himself outwitted and overpowered, and unable to fulfil his duty.

The old Hebrew clasped his redeemed and only son to his heart with passionate affection. Then releasing him from his embrace, he stepped back a few paces and would never have tired of feasting his eyes on Joshua, and of hearing that, faithful to his God, he would henceforth devote himself to the service of his people.

But it was not for long that they might allow themselves to revel in the joy of this happy meeting;

the battle was still to be won, and Nun, as a matter of course, transferred his command to Joshua.

With thankful gladness, and yet not without a pang of regret, Joshua heard of the end which had overtaken the fine army among whose Captains he had long been proud to reckon himself; and he rejoiced to learn that another company of armed shepherds had gone under the leadership of Hur, Miriam's husband, to surprise the turquoise mines at Dophkah at about an hour's march further to the South. If they were victorious they were to rejoin the young men under Ephraim before sundown.

These ardent spirits were burning to fall upon the Egyptians once more; Joshua, who was prudent, and who had reconnoitred the foe, had indeed no doubt that they would succumb to the fierce herdsmen, who far outnumbered them. But he was anxious to avoid bloodshed in this fight which was being waged for his sake, so he desired Ephraim to cut him a plummy leaf from the nearest palm-tree, borrowed a shield, and went forward alone to speak with the enemy, waving his symbol of peace. The chief body of the Egyptians were guarding the entrance to the mines, and recognising the token which invited a parley they desired their captain to meet Joshua. This officer was nothing loth to grant

the Hebrew an interview, but he would first make himself acquainted with the contents of a letter which had just been delivered to him, and which must contain evil tidings, for that much could be gathered from the messenger's demeanour, and from a few broken but ominous words which he had murmured to his fellow Egyptians.

While some of Pharaoh's soldiers fetched refreshment for the exhausted and travel-stained runner, listening with horror to the tidings he panted out in hoarse accents, the officer read the letter.

His brow darkened, and when he had ended he clutched the papyrus fiercely in his hand, for it announced nothing less than the destruction of the army, the death of Pharaoh Menephtah and, moreover, that his eldest surviving son had been proclaimed and crowned as Seti the second; an attempt on the part of Prince Siptah to possess himself of the throne, having completely failed. This Prince had fled to the marsh-lands of the Delta, and the Syrian, Aarsu, after deserting him and ranging himself on the side of the new King, had been raised to the command of the whole army of mercenaries. Baie, the High Priest and Supreme Judge, had been deprived of his offices by Seti II., and banished

from Court. Those who had conspired with Siptah were condemned, not to the copper mines but to the gold mines of Ethiopia. It was also reported that several women attached to the family of the fugitive usurper had been strangled, certainly his mother. Every fighting-man who could be spared from the mines was to return forthwith to Tanis, as there was need of men for the newly constituted legions.

These tidings produced a great effect; for after Joshua had communicated to the Egyptian Captain the fact that he too knew of the destruction of the Egyptian Host, and in a few hours expected fresh reinforcements who had meanwhile been sent to reduce Dophka, the Egyptian surrendered to his imperious tone, and only sought favourable terms and leave to depart. He knew only too well how weak was the force in charge of the turquoise mines, and that he could look for no succour from headquarters. Besides this, the person of the envoy captivated his confidence; so after many excuses and threats he expressed himself satisfied with Joshua's permission to withdraw the garrison unharmed, with their beasts of burthen and provisions for the journey. This, to be sure, was not to be granted till they had laid down their arms and

shown the Hebrews every entrance to the mines where prisoners were working.

The young Hebrews proceeded forthwith to disarm the Egyptians, who were more than twice their number, and many a veteran's eye was moist, while many an one broke his spear or snapped his arrows, cursing and swearing the while: and some of the older men who had formerly served under Hosea and now recognised him, raised their fist and railed at him for a traitor.

It was always the refuse of the troops which was sent on service in this wilderness; most of the men were stamped with traces of evil-living, and their faces were hard and cruel. On the banks of the Nile those were carefully chosen who made ruthless brutality to the helpless their duty.

At last the mines were opened, and Joshua himself seized the miners' lamp and made his way into the sweltering galleries where the State prisoners, naked and loaded with fetters, were hewing out the copper ore. From a distance he could hear the swallow-tailed picks hacking at the hard rock. Then the miserable wailing of men and women in torment fell on his ear, for barbarous drivers pursued them into these depths and goaded the idlers to bestir themselves.

This morning, as being Pharaoh's birthday, they had all been driven to the temple of Hathor, up on the cliff, to pray for the king who had cast them into this uttermost wretchedness; and they would have enjoyed a respite from labour till next morning if it had not been for this unexpected attack; but the chief overseer had compelled them to return underground. Indeed, even the women were all employed in digging, though, as a rule, their tasks consisted only in crushing and sifting the ore which was used in the manufacture of glass and of dye-stuffs.

When the victims heard Joshua's footstep echoing from the bare rock-wall, they feared lest some new torment should be coming upon them, and their cries and lamentations were heard on all sides. But the deliverer had soon reached the first of the toilers, and the glad tidings that he had come to put an end to their wretched lot was soon repeated to the furthest depths of the caverns. Wild shouts of joy filled the galleries long used to wailing and tears; but loud cries for help, groaning and a death-rattle also fell on Joshua's ear, for one hot-headed victim had turned on the driver of his gang and killed him with a blow of his pick. His example fired the vengeance of the others, and before they

could be stopped the rest of the overseers had met the same fate. Not without defending themselves however, and many a prisoner lay dead by the corpse of his tormentor.

In obedience to Joshua's call the liberated throng at length made their way out to the light of day. Wild and harsh indeed were their shouts, mingling with the clatter of the chains they dragged behind them. And the most stout-hearted among the Hebrews, when they saw this troop of despairing wretches in the broad sunshine, shrank from the sight. Many of these helpless creatures had, in former times, enjoyed every earthly blessing in their own homes, or in the King's palace; had been loving fathers and mothers; had rejoiced in their power for good, and had had their part in all the fruits which culture could bestow on a gifted people; and now their weak and blood-shot eyes, though they glittered at first with the tears brought into them by the sudden change from the night of the caverns to the glare of the midday sun, presently flashed with a wild and greedy gleam like those of starving owls.

In their first bewilderment and consternation at the amazing change in their fortunes they tremulously struggled for composure, and suffered the

Hebrews, at Joshua's bidding, to file off the fetters from their ancles; but they soon caught sight of the disarmed soldiers and overseers, who were ranged under a wall of rock under the eye of Ephraim and his followers, and a strange impulse came over them. With a yell and a shriek for which there is no name, and which no words could describe, they tore themselves away from the men who were trying to remove their chains, and without a word or a sign of mutual agreement, rushed with a common instinct, heedless of their metal bonds, on the helpless wretches. Before the Hebrews could stay them each fell on the one who had treated him most cruelly; and here a famished creature gripped the foe who had been his master by the throat, while there a herd of women, stripped of all clothing and horribly disfigured by want and neglect, flew at the man who had most brutally insulted, beaten and injured them, and wreaked their long repressed fury with tooth and nail. It was as though a sudden flood of hatred had broken down the dam and was ravening unchecked for its prey.

There was a frantic attack and defence, a fearful and bloody struggle on the shifting, red sandy soil, an ear-splitting chorus of shrieks, wailing and yells; indeed it was hard to distinguish anything in

the revolting medley of men and women which became more and more inextricably tangled as it was aggravated on one side by the wildest passions and a desire for revenge which was sheer blood-thirstiness, and on the other by the dread of death and strenuous instinct of self-defence.

Only a few of the prisoners had held back, and even they shrieked encouragement to the rest, reviled the enemy with excited vehemence, and shook their fists. The rage with which the released victims now fell on their tormentors was as unmeasured as the cruelty under which they had suffered.

But it was Joshua who had disarmed the tyrants; they were therefore under his protection. He ordered his men to separate the combatants and if possible without bloodshed; this was no easy matter, and many a fresh deed of horror was inevitable. At last it was done, and now it could be seen how strangely passion had lent strength to the most exhausted and wretched, for though no weapons had been used in the struggle, not a few corpses lay on the arena, and most of the guards and overseers were bleeding from ugly wounds.

When peace once more reigned, Joshua de-

manded of the Captain of the little garrison a list of the prisoners in the mines; but he himself was wounded and pointed to the clerk of the works who had not been laid hands on. He, who had been their leech in case of need and had always treated them kindly, was a man of some age who had known sorrow himself, and knowing what suffering means had always been ready to alleviate it in others.

He very willingly read out the names of the captives, among whom were several Hebrews, and, after each had answered to the call, most of them expressed themselves ready to go with the departing tribes.

When at length the disarmed soldiers and guards set forth on their homeward way, the driver who had brought Joshua and his fellow prisoners to the mines went up to old Nun and his son with a crest-fallen air, and begged to be allowed to remain with them; for no good could be in store for him at home, and in all Egypt there was no God so mighty as their God! He had not failed to observe that Hosea, who had himself once been the Captain of thousands, had ever in the greatest straits uplifted his hands to that God, and such fortitude as the Hebrew had shown he had never before seen. Now

indeed he saw and knew that that mighty God had overwhelmed Pharaoh and his host in the sea in order to save His people. Such a God was after his own heart, and he desired nothing better henceforth than to abide with those who served Him.

Joshua gladly consented to his joining himself to them, and it was found that there were fifteen Hebrew prisoners, among them, to Ephraim's great joy, Reuben, the husband of Miriam's devoted and heartbroken ally, Milcah. His reserved and taciturn manners had stood him in good stead, and the hardships he had endured seemed to have had little effect on his strong frame.

A triumphant sense of victory and the joy of success had come over Ephraim and his youthful army; but when the sun had set and no sign yet appeared of Hur and his followers, Nun began to feel some alarm. Ephraim had just declared his intention of sallying forth with some of his comrades in search of tidings, when a messenger arrived announcing that Hur's fighting-men had lost courage on beholding the efficient defence of the Egyptian stronghold. Their leader had vainly urged them to storm it; they had shrunk from the venture, and if Nun could not go to their support they must return ingloriously.

It was at once determined to succour the timorous troop. The Hebrews set forth in high spirits, and on their march through the refreshing night, Ephraim and Nun related to Joshua how Kasana had been found and had died. All she had desired them to tell the man she loved they now made known to him, and it was with deep emotion that the soldier heard it all, marching on in silent thought till they reached Dophkah, the valley of the turquoise-mines, in the midst of which towered the fortress, surrounded by the huts of the captive miners.

Hur and his men remained in ambush in an adjoining valley, and when Joshua had told off all the Hebrew force into several divisions, assigning a task to each, at day-break he gave the signal for the onslaught. The little garrison was overpowered after a short struggle, and the fortress seized. The Egyptians were disarmed, as those at the copper mines had been, and sent off homewards. The prisoners were released, and the lepers, whose encampment was in another valley beyond the mines, and among them those who had been sent hither by Joshua's desire—were permitted to follow the conquerors at a fixed distance.

Joshua had succeeded where Hur had failed, and before the younger men departed with Ephraim,

their leader, old Nun, called them together and then returned thanks to the Lord. Those likewise who were under Hur's command joined in the thanksgiving, and when Joshua presently appeared, Ephraim and his comrades hailed him with loud acclamations.

"Hail to our Captain!" was shouted again and again as they went on their further way. "Hail to him whom the Lord hath chosen to be His sword! Him will we follow and obey; through him our God shall give us the victory!"

Hur's followers also joined in the cry, nor did he forbid them; nay, he had thanked Joshua for storming the strongholds, and expressed his gladness at seeing him free once more.

When they set forth, Joshua, as the younger, drew back to let the elder man take the lead; but Hur had begged Nun, who was much older than himself, to march at the head of the little host, although after the escape of the people, on the shore of the Red Sea, he had been named the chief Captain of the Hebrew fighting men, by Moses and the elders of the tribes.

Their way led them first through a level valley. Then they mounted and crossed a pass over the ridge, this being the only road by which there was any communication between the mines and the Red

no

Sea. The rocky scene was wild and desolate, the path steep and hard to climb. Joshua's aged father, who had spent his life in the plains of Goshen and was unaccustomed to mountain-walking, was carried by his son and grandson amid much glad shouting from the others; and Miriam's husband, who led his men in the rear of Ephraim's troop of comrades, as he heard their joyful cry, climbed after them with a bowed head and eyes fixed gloomily on the ground.

At the top they were to rest, waiting for the main body of the Israelites, who were to be led through the Desert of Sin towards Dophkah.

From the top of the pass the victorious troop looked out for the wandering tribes, but as yet nothing could be seen of them. But as they gazed back on the mountain path by which they had come, the scene was so grand and beautiful that it attracted every eye. At their feet lay a cauldron-shaped valley enclosed by high precipices, ravines, peaks and pinnacles, here white like chalk, there raven-black, grey and brown, red and green, growing as it were, from the sandy base and pointing to the deep-blue heaven, the vault of dazzling light that bent over the desert unflecked by a cloud.

All was barren, desolate, silent, dead. Not a blade, not the humblest growth clung to the sides

of the many-coloured cliffs which shut in the sandy abyss. No bird, no worm nor beetle even, stirred in this still region hostile to life. The eye could nowhere see anything to suggest human existence, or the tilth and handiwork of man. God, it seemed, had created this grand scene unfit for any earthly being, for Himself alone. The man who made his way into these wilds trod a spot which the Most High might have chosen for a retreat and rest, like the silent and unapproachable inner sanctuary of the temple.

The younger men had gazed speechless on the wondrous picture at their feet. Then they lay down on the ground, or did their best to be serviceable to old Nun, who loved the companionship of the young. He was soon reclining in their midst under a hastily contrived awning, and relating with sparkling eyes his son's achievements as Captain of the Egyptians.

Joshua and Hur, meanwhile, were standing together on the highest point of the Pass and gazing down into the desolate valley of rocks, which, surrounded by columns and pillars of God's own hewing, and vaulted over by the blue dome of Heaven, appeared to each as the most stupendous of temples.

The elder kept his eyes fixed gloomily on the ground, but suddenly he broke the silence saying:



"It was at Succoth that I built a heap and cried upon the Lord to be witness between us two. But in this place, and in this stillness, it seems to me that we are certain of the Presence without sign or token." He raised his face to Heaven and went on: "And I lift up mine eyes to Thee, Adonai, I send up my humble words to thee, O Jehovah, Thou God of Abraham and our fathers, that Thou mayest again be witness between me and this man whom thou callest to be thy servant and the sword in Thy right hand!"

He spoke the words loudly, with eyes and hands upraised to Heaven. Then he turned to his companion and said with solemn gravity:

"And I ask thee, Hosea, son of Nun, dost thou remember the witness borne by thee and me by the stone at Succoth?"

"I do remember it," was the answer, "and in bitter ill fortune and great dangers I have learnt what the Most High requires of me. I am ready to devote such strength of soul and body as he hath vouchsafed to me to Him alone, and to His people, which is my people. Joshua, henceforth, be my name. I seek no further help, neither from the Egyptians nor from any other strange folk, for it

was the Lord our God who gave me this name by the mouth of thy wife."

Hereupon Hur broke in with earnest words:—

"This is what I looked to hear; and inasmuch as in this place also the Most High is a witness between me and thee, and heareth our present speech together here, lo, I fulfil that which I have vowed. The elders of the tribes, and Moses, the servant of the Lord, called me to be chief Captain over the fighting-men of Israel. But now thou art Joshua, and hast sworn to serve none other but the Lord our God. Likewise I know that as the Captain of our host thou canst do greater things than I, who have grown grey tending herds, or than any other Hebrew be he who he may; therefore do I perform my vow at Succoth. I will require of Moses, the servant of the Lord, and of the elders of the people that they give thee the office of Captain of the host. I leave the decision in thy hands; and inasmuch as I know that the Lord readeth the heart, I hereby confess that I had evil thoughts of thee in mine. But for the good of the people I will forget all strife between us, and I give thee my right hand in token thereof!" He held out his hand as he spoke, and Joshua grasped it, replying with generous frankness,

"These are the words of a man, and so likewise

shall mine be. For the people's sake, and the cause we both serve, I accept the offered sacrifice. And inasmuch as you solemnly called the Lord to witness who likewise heareth me, I will speak the truth in every thing. The office of Captain of the host of Israel which you will lay upon me, I was called to by the Lord Himself. The call came to me by the mouth of Miriam your wife, and mine it is by right. Yet, that you should be willing to yield your own dignity to me I take as a noble deed; for I know full well how hard it is for a man to resign power, most especially in favour of a younger man who is not dear to his heart. This you have done, and I thank you. And I too have had evil thoughts of you, for through you I lost another blessing which a man finds it harder to give up than his office—the love of a woman.”

Hereupon the blood mounted to Hur's face and he exclaimed:

“Miriam! I never forced her to marry me. Nay, without my paying for her even, after the manner of our fathers, she became my wife of her own free will.”

“I know it,” replied Joshua calmly. “Still, another than you had loved and wooed her longer and more fervently, and the fires of jealousy burn fiercely.

But have no fears. If you were now to get a bill of divorce and bring her to me that I should open my arms and tent to her, I should say: wherefore have you done this thing to yourself and to me?—For I have just now learnt what the love of woman is and can do, and I was mistaken when I believed that she loved me as hotly as I loved her. Yea, and in the course of my wanderings with fetters on my feet, in grief and misery, I vowed to myself that I would devote all that is in me of the fire and force of love to no single creature, but to all my people. Not even the love of woman shall ever turn me away from the great duty I have taken upon me. And as for your wife, I am as a stranger to her, unless it be that she sends for me, as a Prophetess to declare to me some new purpose of the Lord.”

And he on his part held out his hand; and as Hur took it a noise came up from the troop below, calling on the head of the house of Judah and their newly chosen Captain; for messengers were climbing the mountain-slope, waving and pointing to the mighty clouds of dust which swept in front of the coming multitude.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE wanderers came nearer and nearer, and several of the young fighting-men hastened forward to meet them. They were no longer the jubilant host who had joined triumphantly in Miriam's hymn of praise; no, they came slowly, mournfully and deviously towards the mountain's foot. They had to climb the pass from the steepest side; and how the bearers groaned, and the women and children wailed, how bitterly the drivers cursed as they urged the beasts up the narrow, precipitous path, and how hoarse were the voices of the men, parched with thirst, as they set their shoulders to a cart to help the brutes that pulled it!

These tribes, who but a few days since had so thankfully hailed the saving mercy of the Lord, looked, to Joshua's eyes, like a beaten army. The way by which they had travelled from their last resting place, the camp by the Red Sea, had been rough, and waterless; and to a people who had grown up in the fertile plain of Lower Egypt it had

been severe indeed and full of horror. It had led them into the heart of the barren highlands; and at every step their eyes, wont to gaze on wide and luxuriantly green pastures, had fallen on narrow gorges and a naked wilderness. After passing the entrance to the Baba valley, as they made their way along it through the desert of Sin, they had seen nothing but ravines hemmed in by cliffs. A high mountain of the hue of death towered in awful blackness above the rust-brown crags close at hand, and the rocks had seemed to the wanderers like monstrous piles raised by human hands; the layers of square blocks built up at equal distances, stood open to the sky, and it might have been fancied that the giant workmen whose hands had aided the Architect of the world, had been dismissed before finishing their task, which in this solitude need fear no prying eye, and which seemed not intended to be the dwelling of any living creature. Walls of granite, brown and grey, rose on each side of the path, and in the sand which covered it lay heaps of fragments of red porphyry and coal-black stones, looking as if they had been broken by the hammer, or like chips of slag cast out from the smelting furnace. Strangely-shaped masses of gleaming green rock enclosed the small cauldron-shaped valleys of

the higher ground, which opened endlessly one out of another. The mountain path cut them across, and many a time as the pilgrims entered one of these circular gorges, the fear came upon them that the cliff beyond would compel them to return. Their complaints and murmurs had been heard, but presently the gap had come in sight through which they reached another rocky amphitheatre.

On first quitting the encampment by the Red Sea they had frequently passed clumps of acacia, and patches of a fragrant desert-herb which the beasts had eaten with relish; but the further they went into the stony wilderness, the dryer and hotter was the sandy soil, and at last the eye vainly sought a tree or a green thing.

At Elim they had found sweet wells and the shade of palms, and at the Encampment by the Red Sea there had been well-filled tanks, but in the desert of Sin they had found no water to quench their thirst withal, and by midday it seemed as though malicious demons had cut off all shade from the walls of rock, for in these cauldrons and bowls of stone everything was scorching glare, and there was no shelter anywhere from the burning sun. The last of the water they had brought with them had been distributed to man and beast at their last halt-

ing place, and when the host set forth again in the morning, not a drop could be found to assuage their raging thirst. Then the old unbelieving spirit of discontent and rebellion had again come over the Israelites. There was no end to the curses on Moses and the Elders, who had brought them out of the well-watered land of Egypt to such torment as this; however, when at last they had climbed the pass over the ridge, their parched throats were too dry for any loud utterance of complaint and cursing.

Old Nun's messengers, and the youths sent to meet them by Ephraim and Hur, had already announced to them that the smaller party had won a victory and set Joshua and the rest of the prisoners free; but their exhaustion was so complete that even these glad tidings had affected them but little, and brought no more than a faint smile to the men's bearded lips, or a transient gleam of extinct brightness to the women's dark eyes. Miriam even, with Milcah, had remained with her tribe and had not, as was her wont, called the women together to return thanks to the Almighty.

Reuben, the husband of her melancholy young companion, whose dread of disappointment would not even now allow her to indulge in her new-born hope, was a silent, uncommunicative man, and the

first messenger did not know for certain whether he were among the prisoners who had been rescued. Milcah, nevertheless, became greatly excited, and when Miriam desired her to have patience and be still, she run from one to another of her companions and besieged them with questions, and since they could give her no information as to the fate of him she loved and had lost, she broke into loud sobs and fled back to the Prophetess. From her, indeed, she got small comfort, for Miriam, looking forward to hailing her husband as conqueror, and receiving the friend of her childhood rescued and safe, had fallen into a brooding and anxious mood; it seemed as though some heavy burthen weighed on her soul.

As soon as he learnt that the attack on the mines had proved successful and that Hosea was free, Moses had quitted the host of the Hebrews. He had been told that the Amalekites, a warlike race inhabiting the oasis at the foot of Mount Sinai, were making ready to hinder the advance of the exiles across their palmy and fertile island in the desert. He had therefore set out with a handful of picked men, to make his way across the range and reconnoitre the enemy, purposing to rejoin the Israelites between Alush and Rephidim which lay in the valley next before the oasis.

Abidah, the chief of the tribe of Benjamin, with Hur and Nun on their return from the mines, as the heads of the tribes of Judah and Ephraim, were to fill his place and that of his companions.

Now, as the multitude came nearer to the pass they must climb, Hur and some of the freed men went forward to meet them; one especially, outstripping the rest, Reuben namely, Milcah's husband. And she, on her part, had recognised him from afar as he sped down the hill-side, and, in spite of Miriam's remonstrance, hurried forward as far as to the midst of the tribe of Simeon, which marched ahead of their own. And there, the sight of their meeting had uplifted many a dejected soul; and when at length, clinging closely together, they hastened back to Miriam, as the Prophetess gazed into her little friend's face she thought a miracle had been wrought, for the pale lily had been transformed to a blooming and glowing rose. And her lips, which for so long she had scarcely ever opened but for some request or brief reply, now were never still—for how much she wanted to know, how much she had to ask her taciturn husband, who had suffered such terrible things! They were a comely and joyful couple; and to them their path lay not over bare rocks and parched desert-tracks, but through a land

of spring-flowers where brooks murmured and birds sang. And Miriam, who had done her utmost to cheer the pining girl, rejoiced at the sight of their happiness.

Soon, however, every gleam of glad sympathy faded from her face; for while Reuben and Milcah walked on winged feet, scarce seeming to tread the soil of the desert, she marched on with bowed head, weighed down by the thought that she herself was alone to blame if no such happiness as theirs was in prospect for her at this hour. She told herself indeed that she had made a great sacrifice, pleasing in the eyes of the Lord and worthy of great reward, in refusing to hearken to the voice of her heart; but nevertheless she could not help remembering the Egyptian woman who had forbidden her to account herself as one of those who truly loved Hosea, and who herself had died so young for her love's sake.

She, Miriam, was alive; she had killed the most ardent desires of her heart; duty forbade her now to think with ardent longing of the man who lingered on the mountain-top, devoted wholly to the cause of his people and to the God of his fathers, a free and noble soul, the future leader perhaps of her nation's armies, and, if Moses would have it so, the first and

most influential among the Hebrews next to himself. But lost, for ever lost to her. If only, on that fateful night, she had followed the leading of her woman's heart and not that imperious call which placed her above all other women, he would long since have clasped her in his arms as Reuben held his poor, weak Milcah, now so rich in joy and renewed strength.

What thoughts were these! She must drive them down to the deepest recesses of her heart and destroy them utterly; for her it was sin to long so passionately to see him again, and she wished that her husband were by her side to protect her against herself and the forbidden emotions of this dreadful hour.

Hur, the prince of the tribe of Judah, was her husband; not the Egyptian Captain, the rescued captive. What could she henceforth have to do with this son of Ephraim whom she had cast off once for all. Why should she now be aggrieved that he did not hasten to meet her, why should she cherish in secret a foolish hope that it was some important duty which withheld him on the mountain?

She scarcely saw or heard what was going on

around her, and it was Milcah's cry of glad gratitude which warned her of Hur's approach. He had waved her a greeting from afar; but he was alone, without Hosea—or Joshua, which ever he called himself; and the fact that this was a pang to her—nay, that it went to her heart—enraged her against herself. She held her elderly husband in true esteem, and it was with no effort that she welcomed him with affection. He replied to her greeting with heartfelt warmth; and when she pointed to the reunited pair, and lauded him as a conqueror and the deliverer of Reuben and his many fellow-victims, he frankly confessed that the praise was not to him but to Joshua, whom she herself had called in the name of the Lord to be the Captain of the army of Israel.

At this she turned pale, and though the path led steeply upwards, she pressed her husband with urgent questions. When she learnt that Joshua was resting on the ridge with his father and the young fighting-men, and drinking wine, and that Hur had pledged himself to withdraw if Moses should appoint Joshua to be Captain of the host, her knit brows darkened below her lofty brow, and with stern severity she replied:

“You are my lord, and it ill beseems me to

resist your will, even when you so far forget what is due to your wife as to give way to the man who once dared to lift his eyes to her."

Hur eagerly broke in:

"But henceforth you are as a stranger to him; and even if I would give you a bill of divorce he would no longer woo you."

"Indeed!" said she with a forced smile, "and is it to him that you owe this announcement?"

"He has devoted himself body and soul to the welfare of the people, and renounces the love of woman," replied Hur.

But she exclaimed:—"Renunciation is easy when desire could bring nothing in its train but rejection and disgrace. It is not he, who, in our day of greatest need sought help of the Egyptians—not he, but you who ought to be captain over the fighting-men of Israel—you alone who led the Hebrews to their first victory at the Store-House of Succoth, and whom the Lord himself, by his servant Moses, charged to lead the fighting-men of Israel!"

At this Hur looked in some uneasiness at this woman for whom a late but ardent love had glowed up in him, and seeing her bosom heave and her

cheeks flush red, he knew not whether to ascribe it to the fatigue of climbing or the lofty ambition of her aspiring soul, which she had now transferred to the person of her husband.

He was, indeed, glad to think that she cared so much more for him than for the younger and more heroic man whose return had caused him some anxiety; still, he had grown grey in the stern fulfilment of duty, and what he thought it right to do no man could hinder his doing. To the wife of his youth, whom he had buried many years since, his merest sign had been a command, and from Miriam he had as yet met with no contradiction. That Joshua was the most fit to command the fighting men was beyond a doubt, and he replied, panting somewhat, for he too found the ascent hard:—

“Your high esteem honours and pleases me; but although Moses and the Elders have promoted me, you must remember the Heap at Succoth, and my vow. I bear it in mind and shall abide by it.”

She looked aside and said no more till they had reached the top.

The victorious youths hailed them from the summit with loud acclamations. The joy of meeting, the provisions they had won from the foe, and

the good drink which was sparingly measured out to revive those who most needed it, raised the fallen courage of the exhausted wanderers, and the thirsty multitude shortened their rest on the ridge to reach Dophkah all the sooner. They had heard from Joshua that they would find there, not only some ruined tanks, but also a hidden spring of whose existence he had been informed by the driver of the gang of prisoners.

Their way now lay down hill. Haste is the watchword when thirsty souls know that wells are within reach; and soon after sunset they arrived in the valley of turquoise-mines, where they encamped at the foot of the hill on which the now ruined stronghold and store-houses of Dophkah had lately stood. The well, hidden in a grove of acacia sacred to Hathor, was very soon discovered. Fires were quickly lighted, the wavering hearts which in the desert of Sin had sunk almost to despair, now swelled again with the love of life, with hope and thankful trust. The fine acacia-trees indeed were felled to open a way to the spring, whose refreshing waters worked the wondrous change.

Joshua and Miriam had met on the ridge, but had only had time for a brief greeting. Here, in the camp, they were thrown together once more.

It was already late, for the Elders had held long council as to the measures to be taken against an unexpected attack of the Amalekites. Nun and Joshua had joined the assembly. The princely and reverend old man's son had been gladly welcomed, and his counsel that they should form a vanguard of the younger men and a reserve of the older warriors was readily agreed to; they were also to send small parties of picked men to spy out the enemy. Joshua found himself in fact entrusted with every thing appertaining to the conduct and safety of a considerable army. God himself had chosen him to be their captain, and Moses, by leaving him that warning word to be "Steadfast and Strong," had confirmed him in the office. Hur, likewise, who as yet held the post, was ready to resign it to him; and of a surety that man would keep his word, although he had not yet declared his purpose before the Elders. At any rate Joshua was treated as though he were indeed the Captain, and he felt himself their leader.

After the assembly of the Elders had broken up, Hur had desired Joshua to accompany him to his tent, notwithstanding the lateness of the hour; and the warrior had consented, for indeed he desired to speak fully to Miriam. He would fain

prove to her in her husband's presence that he had found the path which she had so zealously pointed out to him.

The tenderest passions of a Hebrew must be dumb in the presence of another man's wife. Miriam must know full well that he had nothing more to ask of her. Indeed he had entirely ceased, even in his hours of solitude, to care or long for her. He confessed to himself that she was a grand and queenly woman, but now he felt a chill as he thought of that lofty dignity. Nay, all her doings appeared to him now in a new light. When she greeted him on the hill-top with a cold smile he had felt convinced that henceforth they were strangers indeed; and as they sat by the blazing fire in front of the Elder's tent, where they now met again, this feeling grew stronger and stronger.

Miriam had long since parted from Reuben and his Milcah, and during her solitary waiting many thoughts had coursed through her brain of what she would now make this man feel—the man to whom in an hour of strong excitement she had opened the depths of her soul.

We are always most prone to be angry with those to whom we have done a wrong, and a woman holds the gift of her love as so great and precious

that even the man she afterwards rejects is to think of her with gratitude for ever after. And Joshua had boasted that he had ceased to care for her whom he had once ardently desired, and who had confessed her love for him—yea, even if she were offered to him. Aye, and he had proved his words, for he had been content to wait with the others instead of coming to meet her.

At last he came, and with him her husband who was so ready to make way for him. But she was still here to keep her eyes open in behalf of the too generous Hur.

The older man, to whose fate she had linked her own, and whose faithful devotion touched her deeply, should not be supplanted by any other man in the high place he filled by right; he must cling to it, if only because she did not choose to be the wife of any man who could not assert himself as the foremost of the Hebrews after her own brothers.

Never had this much venerated woman, who for her part believed too in her own gift of prophecy, felt so bitter, so sore and indignant. She did not own it to herself, but it was as though the hatred which Moses had fired in her soul against the Egyptians, and which no longer had an outlet,

needed some fresh object, and was now turned against the only man she ever had loved. But a true woman can make a show of friendship in word and demeanour to every one excepting those she scorns, and Miriam received her belated guest with haughty but gracious condescension, and begged him to give her further details as to his captivity and release. But she called him by his old name of Hosea, and, when he perceived that this was evidently intentional, he asked her whether she had forgotten that it was she herself who, as the messenger of the Most High, had bidden him henceforth to call himself Joshua. To this she replied, and her features assumed a sharper gravity of expression, that her memory was good, but that she would fain forget the time he referred to. He himself had rejected the name bestowed on him by the Lord, inasmuch as he had preferred to seek the favour of the Egyptian King rather than the help promised him by God. She, faithful to her old habits, should continue to call him Hosea.

The simple-hearted soldier was not prepared for such a hostile tone; however, he preserved a fittingly calm demeanour, and replied with composure that he would but rarely give her the opportunity of calling him by any name. Those who were his

friends found no difficulty in learning to call him Joshua.

To this Miriam answered that she likewise would be willing to do so if her husband agreed, and he himself insisted on it, for a man's name was but as a garment. With offices and dignities it was another matter.

When Joshua then declared that he had always believed that it was God himself who had called him by the voice of His prophetess, herself, to be the Captain of the hosts of Israel, and that he conceded to no man, save only to Moses, the right to deprive him of that office, Hur agreed with him, and offered him his hand.

At this Miriam threw off the self-control she had hitherto preserved, and exclaimed with vehement defiance:

"In this I am not of your mind! You evaded the call of the Most High! Can you deny it? And inasmuch as the Almighty found you at Pharaoh's footstool, instead of at the head of His people, He deprived you of the office to which He had raised you. He himself, the Mightiest of Captains, commanded the wind and waves, and they swallowed up the enemy. Thus ended they who had been

your friends till their heavy fetters taught you what their feelings were to you and your people.

"I sang a hymn of praise to the Lord, and the people joined in my thanksgiving. And on that same day God called another man than you to be chief of the Hebrew host, and he, as you know, is my husband. And although Hur indeed has never learnt the arts of war, yet the Lord surely guides his arm; and who is it that giveth the victory but the Lord Almighty? My husband, I tell you once again—my husband alone is the Captain, and though, in his excess of generosity he forgets it, yet he will assert his right to his office when he remembers whose hand it was that chose him; and I, his wife, lift up my voice to bring it to his mind."

On this Joshua turned to go, to put an end to this unpleasant discussion, but Hur, very wroth at his wife's interference between them, held him fast, assuring him that he should abide by his renunciation. The wind might blow away a woman's words of displeasure; it must rest with Moses to declare whom the Lord had chosen to be Captain of His people.

As he spoke Hur looked in his wife's face with stern dignity, as warning her to reflect, and this seemed to have had the desired effect, as Miriam

turned first pale and then deep scarlet, and she too detained their guest as though she desired to make amends, beckoning him with a trembling hand to come closer to her.

"Yet one thing I must say," she began with a deep breath, "that you may not misunderstand me. I call every man my friend who devotes himself to the cause of Israel, and Hur has told me how much you purpose to sacrifice to our people. It was your confidence in Pharaoh's clemency which came between us—and I know how to value your deep and decisive breach with the Egyptians. Still, I only truly understood the greatness of your deed when I learnt that it was not only lifelong habit, but another and stronger tie that bound you to the foe."

"What is the aim of such a speech?" Joshua broke in, feeling quite sure that she was laying some fresh arrow to the bow-string, intended to wound him. But she paid no heed to the interruption and went on with a defiant sparkle in her eye which belied the moderation of her tongue:

"After the guidance of the Lord had saved us from the foe, the sea cast up on shore the fairest woman we had seen for many a day. I bound up the wounds inflicted on her by a Hebrew woman, and she then confessed that she was full of love for

you, and with her dying breath spoke of you as the idol of her heart."

At this Joshua, deeply incensed, exclaimed:—

"If this were all the truth, O wife of Hur, then my father would have told me an untruth. For, as I learnt from him, it was in the presence of those only who love me that the hapless woman made her last confession: not before you. And she was wise to mistrust your presence, for you would never have understood her!"

He saw a supercilious smile play on Miriam's lips, but he heeded it not and went on. "Your wit is—oh! ten times keener than that poor child's ever was. But in your heart, which once was open to such great things, there is no room for love. It will grow old and cease to beat before it has learnt what love is! Yea, in spite of your flashing eyes I tell you this: you are indeed more than a woman, you are a prophetess, and I cannot boast of such grace. I am no more than a man, and understand the use of the sword better than looking into futurity. And nevertheless I can foretell one thing; you will cherish the hatred of me which burns in your soul—you will even light up the flame in your husband's heart and strive to fan it with the utmost zeal. And I know why! The fiery ambition which possesses

you will not suffer you to be happy as the wife of a man who must stand second to another:—You refuse to call me by the name you yourself gave me. But if hatred and pride do not altogether choke the one feeling which unites us, namely our love of our people, the day will come when of your own free will you will approach me and call me Joshua, unbidden, out of the fulness of your heart!”

With these words he bowed his head in brief farewell to Miriam and her husband, and disappeared in the darkness.

Hur looked after him gloomily and spoke not a word till the footsteps of their departing guest had died away in the silence of the night. Till this hour he had always looked up to his wife with tender admiration, but now the wrath he had restrained with difficulty knew no bounds. With two long strides he came close to her; she was even paler than he, as she stood gazing into the fire like one distraught. His voice had lost its rich metallic ring, and sounded harsh and thin as he said:—

“I was so bold as to woo a maiden who believed herself nearer to God than other women, and now she is mine she makes me repent of my audacity!”

“Repent?” she panted with white lips, and as

she looked up at him a defiant glance sparkled in her black eyes.

He seized her hand with so firm a grip that it hurt her, and went on as he had begun:—"Yes, you make me repent of it! Shame on me if I suffered this hour of degradation to be followed by such another!"

She tried to wrench her hand free, but he would not surrender it, and went on:—"I wooed and won you to be the pride of my house. I believed I was sowing honour, I have reaped dishonour—for what deeper disgrace may befall a man than that the wife should have the mastery and dare to wound the heart of his friend, whom hospitality should protect, with hostile words. A woman, such as you are not, a simple, right-minded wife, who could look back on her husband's past life and think not merely of how he may gain promotion because she desires to share his greatness—such a wife would not need to be reminded that Hur, the man who is your husband, has earned dignities and honours enough in the course of a long life to be able to lay down some portion of them without losing anything by it. Not he who is chief in command, but he who does most from self-sacrificing love of his nation, is the greatest in Jehovah's sight. You crave

to stand aloof and be honoured by the crowd as the chosen handmaid of God. I do not forbid it, so long as you do not forget what your duty as a wife and mistress requires of you. To me, indeed, you also owe love, for you promised to love me on the day when we were wed: howbeit, the human heart can only give what it has to give; and Hosea is right when he says that the love which glows and gives warmth is far from your cold soul."

He turned his back on her and withdrew into the darkness of the tent; she remained standing by the fire, the flickering blaze lighting up her beautiful pallid features. She set her teeth tightly and clenched her hands over her heaving bosom as she gazed after her husband. He had stood before her in the consciousness of his dignity, grey-haired, tall, and reverend, a worthy and princely leader of the people. Each of his words had pierced her heart like a spear-thrust. The power of truth had weighted his speech, and had held up a mirror to Miriam which showed her own image from which she started in horror. Now she longed to hasten after him, and beseech him to give her again the love with which he had hitherto surrounded her; she, alone in the world, had gratefully acknowledged that she felt that she could fully return the precious boon, for she

longed, ah, how ardently, to hear one kind and forgiving word from his lips. Her own heart seemed to her as a cornfield blighted by malignant mildew; withered, dried up and ruined, where all had been so fresh and blossoming.

Her thoughts flew to the rich arable of Goshen, which, after bearing the richest crops, remained hard and parched till the river rose to soften it again, and bring the seed laid in its bosom to life and verdure. Thus was it with her; but she had cast the ripening ears into the fire, and wilfully built up a dam between the beneficent stream and the dry land.

But there was yet time. She knew indeed that in one thing he was unjust, that she was a woman like any other, and capable of devoting herself with passionate ardour to the man she loved. It depended only on her to prove this to him and bring him to her arms. Just now, to be sure, he had a right to regard her as hard and unfeeling; for there, where love was wont to bloom, a bitter spring had risen which poisoned all it touched.

Was this the revenge taken by her heart whose ardent desires she had so heroically smothered?

God had scorned her most precious offering; it was impossible to doubt the fact. His presence no longer uplifted her soul in visions of glory, and she

could hardly call herself His prophetess any longer. This sacrifice had led her, who was truthful, to falsehood; conscious of always desiring the right she had hitherto lived at peace with herself; now she suffered tortures of unrest. Since that momentous step, nothing she cared for had smiled on her who had been so full of hope. She who had never seen the woman for whom she need make way, had been sent from the presence of a poor, dying stranger. She had always felt kindly to everyone who loved her race and the sacred cause of her people, and now she had insulted one of their best and noblest champions with bitter wrath. The poorest serf's wife could win the husband who loved her to a closer union, and she had only estranged hers.

She had come to his hearth seeking only shelter from the cold, but she had found unexpected warmth, and his generosity and love had fallen on her aching soul like balm. He could not indeed give her back what she had lost, but he was a welcome substitute. And he now believed her incapable of a tender emotion; still, she must have love to live, and no sacrifice would be too great to win him back again.

But pride was no less a condition of her existence, and each time she made up her mind to humble herself and open her heart to her husband,

a fear of degradation checked her; and there she stood as though spell-bound, till the brands at her feet fell over and died out, and darkness surrounded her.

Then a strange fear fell upon her.

Two bats, which had come forth from the mines to flutter round the fire, flew close to her face with a ghostly stir. Everything prompted her to retire to the tent, to go back to her husband, and with sudden decision she went into the spacious room, lighted by a lamp. But Hur was not there, and a slave girl who met her, told her that he had said he would remain with his son and grandson till it was time to depart.

A sense of bitter woe fell upon her; she lay down to rest, more desolate and shame-stricken than she had ever felt since her childhood.

A few hours later the camp was alive, and when, in the grey light of dawn, her husband entered the tent with a brief greeting, her pride once more uplifted its head, and her reply was cold and demure.

He was not alone; his son Uri followed him in. He looked graver too than usual, for the men of Judah had assembled at an early hour and besought him not to surrender the Captaincy in favour of a man of another tribe than theirs.

This had come upon him as a surprise. He could only refer them to Moses, and the hope that their leader's decision might be given against himself grew keener as his young wife's resolute glance again roused his spirit to opposition.

CHAPTER IX.

WITH refreshed body and revived heart the Hebrews set forth again early on the following morning; and by this time the little spring, which they had even dug deeper to promote its flow, was for the time exhausted. They cared the less that it refused to yield any water to carry on their journey, because they expected to find more wells at Alush.

The sun mounted the cloudless sky in radiant majesty. Its splendour exerted its stirring influence on the hearts of men even, and the rocks and yellow sandy soil, shone as brightly as the blue vault above. The pure aromatic air of the desert, cooled by the hours of darkness, was so light that it was a pleasure to breathe, and walking was enjoyment.

The men showed firmer confidence, and the women's eyes flashed more brightly than for some time past, for the Lord had shown once more that He was mindful of His people in their need; and

fathers and mothers looked fondly on the sons who had overpowered the enemy. In every tribe some one had been welcomed home who had been given up for lost, and it was a joyful duty to heal the injuries inflicted by the hard labour of the mines. Moreover Joshua's deliverance was a cause of rejoicing, not alone among his people but throughout the multitude; and by all, excepting those of the tribe of Judah, he was now called by that new name with full belief in the comforting promise conveyed by it. The young men who, under him, had put the Egyptians to rout, told in their tribes what sort of man Joshua was; how he thought of everything and put every one in the very place where he could do best. The mere light of his eye as it fell on a man fired his warlike ardour; the foe quaked only to hear him shout the battle-cry.

And those who spoke of old Nun, or of the noble lad his grandson, did so with kindling glances. The high pretensions of the tribe of Ephraim had often been a source of disagreement, but on this occasion it was by common consent allowed to march first. Only the men of Judah were heard to murmur and complain. They must, no doubt, have some serious ground of discontent, for Hur, the prince of their tribe, and his wife walked on with

bowed heads as if oppressed by a heavy burthen, and those who spoke with them, had certainly better have chosen some other opportunity. So long as the sun's rays still fell aslant, there was a little shade cast by the sandstone peaks which hemmed the path in on both sides or stood up in its midst, and when the sons of Korah began to sing a hymn, old and young joined in; Milcah, no longer pallid, loudest and gladdest of all, and Reuben her released and happy husband.

The children picked up the golden fruits of the Colocinth, which fell from the now withered gourds above as if they dropped from heaven, and brought them to their parents. But they were as bitter as gall to eat, and a morose old man of the tribe of Zebulon, who kept some of the stout rinds to serve to hold salve, said:—"Thus will this day be. It has a fair seeming; but when the sun is high and we lack water we shall know its bitterness!"

And his prophecy was only too soon fulfilled; for the path, after leaving the region of sand, went on through rocky cliffs like walls of red brick and grey stone, up and up; now at an easy slope and now very steep; the sun too mounted higher and higher, and the heat increased as the hours went on. Never had its arrows fallen more cruelly on

the pilgrims, striking pitilessly on their unprotected heads and necks. Here an old man and there a young one sank to the ground under its fierce glow, or tottered forward like one drunk, supported by his neighbours and clasping his hand to his brow. The blistered skin peeled off their faces and hands, and there was not one whose tongue and gums were not dried by the heat, or whose newly found courage it did not quell.

The beasts toiled sullenly forward with drooping heads and heavy feet, or rolled rebelliously in the sand till the herdsman's thong compelled them to collect their strength for a fresh effort.

At noon the Israelites were allowed to halt, but there was not a hand breadth of shade to give them the reprieve they sought; and those who threw themselves down on the ground found fresh torment instead of rest. Thus the hapless wretches of their own accord set forth again soon for the wells of Alush.

Until this day, as soon as the sun had passed the meridian and begun to sink towards the west, the heat had abated, and a fresher breeze fanned their brows before the fall of dusk; but here the rocks for hours gave forth the heat they had absorbed from the noontide sun, till at length a faintly

cooler breath came up from the sea on the west. At the same time the vanguard which, by Joshua's advice, marched foremost, halted, and the whole multitude came to a standstill. Men, women and children all fixed their eyes and pointed with hands, sticks and crooks to the same spot, for there, before them, a strange and novel spectacle attracted their gaze. A shout of amazement and delight broke from their parched and weary lips which had long since ceased to stir for speech; it rapidly spread from one division to the next, from tribe to tribe, to the lepers that closed the train and the rear guard beyond. One and another elbowed his neighbour and whispered a name familiar to them all—that of the Holy Mountain where the Lord had promised to Moses that he would lead His people into a good and pleasant land flowing with milk and honey. None had told the weary multitude that this was the place, and yet they knew that they beheld Horeb and the peak of Sinai, the most sacred summit of this mass of granite.

Although but a mountain, yet was it the throne of the Almighty God of their fathers!

At this hour the whole sacred hill seemed, like the burning bush out of which He had there spoken to his chosen servant, to be steeped in fire. Its seven-

peaked crown towered from afar, high above the hills and vales that surrounded it, burning like an enormous ruby lighted up by a blaze of glory in the clouds.

Such a sight none of them had ever beheld. But the sun sank lower and lower, and disappeared in the sea, which the mountain hid from their view; the glowing ruby turned to solemn amethyst and then to the deep purple of the violet; but the people still gazed spell-bound on the holy mount. Nay, even when the day-star had altogether vanished, and only its reflection bordered the edge of a long, level cloud with gleaming gold, they opened their eyes the wider, for a man of the tribe of Benjamin, his brain turned by the splendour of the scene, declared that they beheld the trailing mantle of Jehovah, and those about him to whom he pointed it out caught the pious rapture.

For a little while the pilgrims had forgotten thirst and exhaustion in watching the inspiring spectacle. But ere long their high enthusiasm was turned to the deepest discouragement, for, when night fell, and after a short march they reached the wells of Alush, it was discovered that the desert-tribe which had encamped here yesterday, had

choked the spring, which at best was but brackish, with stones and rubbish.

All the water they had carried with them had been used before reaching Dophkah, and the exhausted spring at the mines had not sufficed to fill the skins. Thirst, which at first had only dried their gums, now began to burn their vitals. Their scorched throats could not swallow the solid food of which they had abundance. On every side there was nothing to be seen but heart-broken looks and pitiable or disgraceful scenes. Men and women storming, cursing, weeping and groaning, or else sunk in morose despair. Some, whose wailing infants clamoured for water, had gathered round the choked well and were fighting for a spot on the ground where they hoped to collect a few drops of the precious fluid in a sherd. And the beasts lowed and bleated so miserably that it cut their drivers to the heart like a reproach.

Very few cared to exert themselves to pitch a tent. The night was so warm, and the sooner they went forward the better; for Moses had promised to join them again at a spot but a few hours further on. He alone could help them; it was his bounden duty to save man and beast from perishing of drought.

If the God who had promised them such great things left them to perish in the wilderness with all their little ones, then the man in whose guidance they had put their trust was a deceiver, and the God whose power and mercy he was never weary of preaching to them, was false and feebler than the idols with heads of men and beasts, whom they had worshipped in Egypt. Blasphemy and curses were mingled with threats—and when Aaron came forth to comfort the thirsty pilgrims with words of hope, many a clenched fist was shaken at him.

Even Miriam was presently forbidden by her husband to console the women with kindly speech, for a woman whose sinking child clung dying to its mother's dried up breast, had picked up a stone to fling, and others had followed her example.

Old Nun and his son were more fortunate. They were both agreed that Joshua must fight, whatever post Moses might desire him to fill; and Hur himself had led him forth to the fighting-men who had hailed him gladly. The old man and his son both knew the secret of inspiring courage. They spoke to the men, of the well-watered oasis of the Amalekites, which was now not far away, and reminded them that the Lord himself had provided the weapons they held in their hands. Joshua assured

them, too, that they far out-numbered the warriors of the desert-tribe. If their young men only showed themselves as brave as they had been at Dophka and the copper mines, by God's help they should win the victory.

Soon after midnight, Joshua, after holding council with the Elders, bid the trumpets sound to call the fighting-men together. He set them in ranks under the starlit sky, appointed a leader to each division, and impressed on each the meaning of the word of command he was to obey.

They came at the call, half perishing with thirst; but the fresh effort to which their Captain exhorted them, wonderfully revived their fainting energies, as well as the hope of victory and a precious reward; a plot of land, namely, at the foot of the Holy Mountain, rich in wells and palms.

Among the youths came Ephraim, giving life to the others by his own inexhaustible vigour. And now when the Captain, to whom God had already proved that he thought him worthy of the help which his name promised, addressed the men, bidding them put their trust in the Lord Almighty, it had quite a different effect from that produced by Aaron, whose admonishing they had hearkened to every day since they set out.

When Joshua had ended, a jubilant shout went up from many young throats though parched with thirst: "Hail to the Captain! You are our leader; we will follow none other."

Then he went on gravely and decisively to explain to them that he was prepared to show to the utmost such obedience as he required of them. He was ready to march as the last man in the lowest place, if it should be Moses' will.

The stars were still bright in a cloudless sky when a cow-horn called the Hebrews to set forth again. A runner had already been sent on to report to Moses of their evil plight, and Ephraim had flown after him as soon as he was free to do so.

But throughout the morning's march Joshua kept his troops in strict order, as though an onslaught was to be expected. Meanwhile he took advantage of every minute to teach the fighting-men and their leaders something for the coming struggle, to note their behaviour, and close up their ranks. He thus kept them on the alert till the stars began to pale.

Few indeed were the murmurs or complaints among the fighting-men, but rebellion, curses and threats were all the more rife among those who bore no weapons. Long before dawn the cry was heard, more and more often, of: "Down with Moses! We

will stone him when we find him!" And indeed their knees were failing them for weariness, and the misery of their wives and children was visible to every eye.

Not a few, indeed, picked a piece of rock from the path, with a wild curse and flashing eye; and at last the fury of the multitude waxed so wild and reckless that Hur called a council of the better disposed among the Elders, and they hastened on with the fighting-men of the tribe of Judah to protect Moses, if it should come to the worst, by force of arms against the rebels. Joshua took on himself the task of keeping back the mutineers, who with curses and threats strove to outstrip the rest. When at last the sun rose in blinding splendour the march was no more than a struggle onwards of enfeebled wretches. Even the men at arms tottered forwards half-paralysed. Still, when the rebels tried to pass them they did their duty, and thrust them back with spear and sword. The valley along which they made their way was shut in on both sides by steep walls of grey granite, which glittered and sparkled strangely as the slanting sunbeams fell on the fragments of quartz thickly imbedded in the primæval rock. By noon it would be scorchingly hot again, between these steep cliffs in some parts almost

closing across the path; as yet, however, they lay in morning shade. And the beasts, at any rate, found refreshment, for among the rocks in many places succulent aromatic plants afforded them pasture, and the shepherd boys, taking off their loin cloths, filled them with the fodder in spite of their exhaustion, to offer it to their famishing favourites.

Thus they struggled on for less than an hour, when suddenly a loud shout of joy rang out, spreading from the foremost in the van to the last man in the long train. No one had been told in so many words to what it owed its origin, but every one knew it must mean that they had come upon fresh water. Then Ephraim came flying back with the glad tidings, and what a miracle it worked on the exhausted wanderers. They pulled themselves up as though they had already emptied the brimming jar at a deep draught, and struggled forward at double speed. The ranks of fighting-men now no longer hindered them, but hailed those of their tribe who hastened past them with glad greetings.

Soon, however, the hurrying tide stopped of its own accord; for at the spot where refreshment was to be found the foremost came to a standstill, and behind them the whole multitude were checked more effectually than by moats and walls. The

toiling pilgrims had become a vast, disorderly crowd, filling the whole valley. At last men and women turned back, carrying well-filled water-jars in their hands and on their heads, beckoning joyfully to their friends with words of encouragement, and making their way through the throng to their own families; but the precious fluid was snatched away from many before it could be conveyed to its destination.

Joshua and his troop had made their way to the immediate vicinity of the wells, to keep order among the thirsty people. However, for some little time there was nothing for it but patience, while the mighty men of the tribe of Judah, who, with Hur at their head, had been the first to reach the spot, wielded their axes and strove with levers hastily made out of the trunks of acacia-trees, to clear away the huge boulders which strewed the path, and open up the way to the spring which leapt forth from several rifts in the rock.

At first it had flowed among a chaos of moss-grown blocks of granite; but presently they succeeded in directing the flow of the precious fluid, and in checking the waste by forming a sort of tank where even the cattle could drink. Those who had filled their jars had caught the water in its overflow

from the hastily contrived dam. Now the men whose duty it was to watch the camp kept the throng off, so as to give the water time to settle and clear in the large, new basin which it filled with amazing rapidity.

In sight actually of the blessing for which they had so loudly clamoured it was easy now to have patience. They had found the treasure; all that was necessary was to husband it. Not a word of discontent or complaint or reviling was now to be heard; many indeed looked abashed and ashamed on this new mercy from the Most High.

Loud and jubilant voices were heard far and wide, shouting and talking; but the man of God, who knew every rock and valley, every pasture and spring of the hills of Horeb better than any one, and who had again been the instrument of such great blessing to his people, had retired into a neighbouring ravine, as if seeking refuge there from the thanks and acclamations which rose louder and spread further every moment, seeking peace and silence above all things for his deeply agitated spirit.

Presently hymns of thanksgiving to the Lord were to be heard from the Hebrew multitude, who, refreshed and revived, and overflowing with gratitude, were pitching their camps with as much hope

and confidence as ever they had known. The sound of song, of happy laughter, jests and encouraging cries, formed an accompaniment to the work of putting up tents; and the encampment was rapidly effected, as rapidly as if it had been raised from the earth by a magic spell.

The eyes of the young men flashed with martial ardour, and many a beast shed its blood to make a feast.

Mothers, after doing their part by the hearth and in the tent, led their little ones to the spring to show them the spot where Moses with his staff had pointed out the spring bubbling through the rift in the granite. Many men likewise stood with hands and eyes raised to heaven, round the place where Jehovah had shown such grace to His people, and among them were not a few of those murmurers who had picked up stones wherewith to stone the servant of God. None doubted that they here beheld the result of a great miracle. The elders impressed on the little ones that they should never forget this day, and this water; and an old grandmother was wetting her grandchildren's brows at the brink of the pool to ensure divine protection for them for the rest of their lives.

Hope, thankfulness, and the glow of trust pre-

vailed on all hands; even the fear of the hostile Amalekites had vanished, for what ill could come to him who put his trust in the mercy of so omnipotent a Protector.

Joy was absent from one tent alone, and that the finest of them—the tent of the head of the tribe of Judah. Miriam sat among her women after distributing the midday meal in silence to the men overflowing with grateful enthusiasm; she had heard from Milcah's husband Reuben that Moses had made Joshua Captain of the Hebrew host in the presence of all the Elders. Hur, her husband, she also was told, had expressed himself ready and glad to renounce the dignity in favour of the son of Nun.

The prophetess had not chosen to join in the people's song of praise; when Milcah and her women had besought her to go with them to the well, she had bidden them go without her. She was now expecting her husband and wished to meet him alone; she must show him that she desired his forgiveness. But he did not come; for, after the council of the Elders had broken up, he remained with the new Captain to help him to arrange his men, and this he did as a subordinate obedient to Hosea, who owed his call and his name of Joshua to her.

Her waiting women, who had gathered about her, were busy spinning; but she could not endure this humble toil, and while she sat with idle hands staring into vacancy the hours went slowly indeed. And at the same time her purpose of humbling herself before her husband grew feebler. She felt impelled to pray for strength to bow before the man who was in truth her master; but the prophetess, usually so apt at fervent prayer, could not find the right vein of devotion. If now and then she succeeded in collecting her thoughts and uplifting her heart, something disturbed her. Every fresh report which was brought to her from the camp, added to her displeasure. When at last dusk was falling, a messenger came desiring her to have no care for the men's evening meal, which had already been long prepared and waiting; Hur, with his son and grandson, were about to accept the bidding of Nun and Joshua to share theirs.

At this she felt it hard to restrain her tears. And if she had suffered them to flow unchecked they would have been the bitter drops of wrath and wounded pride, not tears of distress and regretful longing.

During the hours of the evening-watch, the war-

riors all marched past her, and from rank to rank the cry re-echoed of: "Hail to Joshua!" And those who repeated the watchword "Steadfast and Strong," did so in honour of the man she once had loved,—but now hated, as she confessed to herself. None but the men of his own tribe honoured her husband with a special cry. Was this their gratitude for the generosity which had led him to abdicate the post to which he alone had a right, in favour of a younger man? It cut her to the heart to see her husband so deposed; but it wounded her yet more to find that Hur could thus abandon his lately wedded wife.

The evening meal at the door of the Ephraimites' tent was a long one. A little before midnight she sent her serving-woman to bed and lay down herself to wait till her husband should return, to confess to him all that had troubled and angered her, and what she most desired.

She thought it would be easy to keep awake when she was in such anguish of mind; but the great fatigues and strain of the last few days and nights had told upon her, and in the midst of a prayer for humility and the love of her husband, she was overcome by sleep. At last, at the hour of the first morning watch, when day was just begin-

ning to break, she was startled from her slumbers by the sound of the trumpets giving warning of immediate danger.

She rose quickly, and glancing at her husband's couch, saw that it was empty; still it had been used, and on the sandy soil—for mats were spread only in the living-rooms—she saw the traces of Hur's foot-steps by her own bedside. He must have stood close by her, and perhaps while she slept, have gazed tenderly down on her face.

This was indeed the truth; her old slave-woman told her so unasked. For after she had roused Hur she had seen him carefully shading the lamp while he looked on Miriam's face, and bent over her for some minutes, as though he would have kissed her. This was good hearing, and rejoiced the lonely wife so greatly that she forgot her usual calm dignity and pressed her lips to the wrinkled brow of the little, bent old woman, who had done service of yore to her parents. Then she hastily bid her maids to braid her hair and dress her in a holiday robe of light blue which Hur had given her, and hastened forth to take leave of him.

Meanwhile the troops had formed in order, the tents were being struck, and Miriam sought her hus-

band for a long time in vain. At last she found him; but he was deeply engaged in talk with Joshua, and as she caught sight of the Captain, the prophetess shuddered with a sudden chill, nor could she persuade herself to address the men.

CHAPTER X.

A hard battle must be fought, for, as the spies reported, the Amalekites had been joined by other desert-tribes. Nevertheless, the Israelites were still almost twice their number; but how far inferior in warlike skill were Joshua's troops to their opponents, inured to battle and ambush. The foe came up from the South, from the oasis at the foot of the Sacred Mountain, which was the primeval home of their race, their foster mother, their beloved, their all, and to them well worth shedding their blood to the last drop for.

Joshua, now the Captain recognised by Moses and all the people as leader of the Hebrew fighting-men, led his newly formed army to the widest portion of the valley, as this allowed him to take the utmost advantage of their superior numbers. The camp was removed by his orders and pitched in a narrower place at the northern end of the valley of Rephidim, in which the struggle must be fought out,

as this made it easier to defend the tents. He left the command of the camp and of the men told off to protect it to the prudent care of his father.

He had wished to leave Moses and all the Elders of the tribes safe within the precincts of the camp; but their great leader had gone forward with Hur and Aaron, and climbed a peak of granite whence they could look down upon the fight. Thus the fighting men could see Moses and his two companions on the cliff which commanded the top of the valley, and feel assured that the servant of the Lord would not cease to beseech Him to spare them and give them the victory. But every simple man in that host, and every woman and old man in the camp, in that hour of peril turned to the God of their fathers; and the rallying cry chosen by Joshua, "Jehovah our Refuge," bound the hearts of the warriors to the Ruler of the battle, and reminded the most faint-hearted and unskilled among the fighting men that he could not take a step nor deal a blow, but the Lord would mark it.

The trumpets and cow-horns of the Hebrew host rang out louder and louder, for the Amalekites were pouring down on the level ground which was to be the field of battle.

It was a strange scene for such a struggle, such as no experienced Captain would ever willingly have chosen, for it was shut in on both sides by steep grey cliffs of granite towering up to heaven. If the foe should win, the camp too must be lost, and any benefit to be derived from knowledge of warfare must here be displayed within the smallest conceivable space. To circumvent the enemy or surprise him in flank seemed quite impossible; but even the rocks were turned to account by the leader, for wherever it was possible, he had made his best slingers and archers climb up them to no great height, and instructed them to watch for a sign at which they should mingle in the fight.

At the first glance Joshua perceived that he had not overrated the foe, for those who began the battle were bearded men, with clearly cut, manly faces, out of which their black eyes glowed at the enemy with wild and blood-thirsty hatred. And every man, like their leader himself, a grey-haired man of many scars, was spare and supple of limb. They wielded the curved sabre, the javelin of heavy sharpened wood, and the lance ornamented with a tuft of camel's hair, like practised warriors, and the war-cry rang out loud, cruel and death-defying from the deep breasts of these men, who felt that they

must die or see their dearest possession in the hands of the enemy.

At the first onslaught Joshua led forward the men whom he had armed with the large Egyptian shields and lances, and these, fired by their valiant leader, made a good stand, particularly as the narrow defile into the field of battle hindered their wild opponents from taking full advantage of their superior skill. But when the men on foot presently withdrew, and a troop of warriors on dromedaries rushed down on the Hebrews, many of them were scared at the strange aspect of these creatures, known to them only by description. They cast away their shields and fled with loud outcries; and wherever a gap was made, the riders drove in their dromedaries and thrust down at the foe with their long sharp javelins. At this the herdsmen, unused to such an attack, thought only of saving themselves, and many turned to fly, for sudden terror seized them as they saw the flaming eyes and heard the shrill, malignant cry of the enraged Amalekite women, who had rushed into the fight to add fuel to their husbands' courage and terrify the enemy. They held on to the humped brutes by leathern straps hanging down from the saddle, which they clutched in their left hands, and allowed themselves to be

dragged whithersoever the riders went. Hatred seemed to have steeled each female heart against fear of death, compassion and womanly feeling; and the hideous cry of these Megæras broke the spirit of many a brave Hebrew.

But no sooner did their Captain see them give way than he took advantage of the disorder, and bid them retire and allow the savage foe to enter the valley; for he said to himself that the superior number of his men could be turned to better account as soon as they had the opportunity of pressing on the foe from both flanks as well as in front, and when the slingers and archers could take their part in the fight.

Ephraim and the bravest of his comrades, who remained with him as runners, were now sent back to the northern end of the valley to tell the leaders of the ranks posted there what Joshua proposed, and to order them to advance. The swift-footed shepherd lads vanished as nimbly as gazelles; and it soon was seen that their Captain had hit on the right plan; for no sooner had the Amalekites reached the middle of the valley than the Hebrews fell upon them from all sides; several who were bravely rushing forward fell in the sand as they brandished the

sword or spear, hit by a round pebble or a sharp arrow, from sling or bow.

Moses, meanwhile, kept his place on the cliff overlooking the battle field with Aaron and Hur. From thence he watched the fight in which he, who had grown grey in peaceful pursuits, could take part only with heart and soul. Not a movement, not a sword raised or dropped among friends or foes, escaped his keen eye; but when the fray had fairly begun, and the Captain, with wise forethought, had opened a way for the enemy into the midst of his own fighting men, Hur exclaimed to the grey-haired man of God: "My wife, your sister's lofty spirit has indeed discerned the truth. The son of Nun belies the call of the Most High. What is this? We are the superior force and yet the enemy makes his way unhindered into the very heart of our host. As the waters of the Red Sea stood aside at the word of the Lord, so do our ranks, — and, as it would seem, by their leader's bidding."

"Only to swallow up Amalek as the waves of the sea swallowed up the Egyptians," was Moses' reply.

Then he lifted up his hands to Heaven and cried:

“Look down, Jehovah, on Thy people, who are in fresh straits. Strengthen the arm and give sight to the eye of him whom Thou hast chosen to be Thy Sword. Lend him the succour Thou didst promise him when Thou didst name him Joshua instead of Hosea! And if Thou dost no more suffer him to prove himself steadfast and strong as beseems the Captain of Thy choice, then do Thou, with the Hosts of Heaven, set Thyself at the head of Thy people that they may put their enemies to flight!”

Thus the man of God besought the Lord with hands lifted on high, and ceased not to entreat Jehovah and cry to Him whose mighty will ruled His people; and presently Aaron whispered to him that the foe was hard beset, and that the courage of the Israelites was proving itself nobly. Joshua was now here and now there, and the ranks of the enemy were visibly thinner, while those of the Hebrews seemed to multiply. And Hur confirmed this report, and added that the untiring zeal and heroic contempt of death of the Son of Nun were beyond all praise. He had, at that moment, felled one of the wildest of the Amalekites with his battle-axe.

At this Moses breathed more freely; his arms fell by his side and he eagerly watched the course

of the fight which was surging and raging, tossing and roaring at his feet.

The sun had by this time reached its noon and shone down on the combatants with scorching fires. The gray granite walls of the valley glowed with intenser heat every hour, and the sweat had long since stood on the brows of the three men on the rock. What, then, must the heat be below, adding to the labour of struggling and wrestling! How sorely must the wounds ache of the bleeding wretches lying there in the sand.

Moses felt it all as though he himself were suffering it, for his immovably steadfast soul was rich in compassion, and he bore this people, who were of his own flesh and blood, and for whom he lived and laboured, in his heart as a father does his child. The wounds inflicted on his brethren pained him; yet his heart beat high with proud gladness as he beheld how those whose cowardly subjection had but a short while since so greatly fired his wrath, had learned the arts of attack and defence, and how one band of young Hebrews after another rushed on the enemy with loud cries of "Jehovah our Refuge!"

In Joshua's proud, heroic form he saw the pos-
Joshua. II.

terity of Israel as he dreamed and hoped it might be, and he now no longer doubted that the Lord had indeed called Joshua to be the Captain of his people. Rarely had his large commanding look flashed more brightly than at this moment.

But what was that?

A cry of horror broke from Aaron's lips, and Hur started to his feet and gazed anxiously towards the north; for, from the spot where the people's tents were pitched, came a fresh battle-cry, mingling with loud and lamentable shrieks, not, as it seemed, from the men alone, but from women and children. The enemy had surprised the camp.

A troop of the Amalekites had been detached from the main body, long before the battle had begun, and had made their way round by a mountain defile, known only to themselves.

At this Hur thought of his young wife, and a vision rose before Aaron's mind of Elisheba his faithful spouse, of his children and grand-children; and both with beseeching eyes dumbly entreated Moses to allow them to fly to the rescue of those dearest to them; but the austere chief refused, and kept them with him.

Then again standing up, he raised his heart and hand once more to Heaven. With fervent prayer

he cried to the Lord, and ceased not his entreaties; as the minutes went on the more ardent was his beseeching, for all that the Hebrew host had won they now seemed to be losing. Every glance at the battle field, every thing his companions told him, while, with spirit uplifted to the Lord his God, he stood blind and deaf to the scene below, added to the burthen of his woes.

Joshua had placed himself at the head of a strong party of men and withdrawn from the fray, and with him were Bezaleel, Hur's grandson, Aholiab, his favourite comrade, young Ephraim, and Reuben, Milcah's husband. It was with a heart full of blessings that Hur marked them retire, for they could only have quitted the fight in order to succour the camp. He listened with eager ears to the sounds from the north, as though he divined how deeply he was interested in the broken cries and lamentations which came up on the breeze from the tents.

Old Nun had taken up arms against the troop of Amalekites who had fallen on the camp, and had fought valiantly; but when he perceived that the men whom Joshua had left under his command could no longer stand against the onslaught of the foe, he sent to crave reinforcement of the Captain. Joshua forthwith entrusted the further conduct of

the battle to Nahshon, the second chief of the tribe of Judah, and to Uri, the son of Hur, who had distinguished himself by his courage and forethought, and hastened with other chosen men to help his father.

He had not lost a moment, and yet the fight was already decided by the time he reached the scene of the struggle; for, as he approached the camp the Amalekites had broken through his father's line of defence, and cut him off from the tents on which they were rushing.

First, then, Joshua rescued the brave old man from the foe, and next he had to drive the sons of the desert away from the camp; this gave rise to a sharp struggle, man to man, and hand to hand; and he himself could be in but one spot at a time, and must needs leave it to the younger fighting men to act for themselves, each in his own place.

Here too he raised the cry: "Jehovah our Refuge!" and rushed, shouting these words, into Hur's tent, which was the first to be seized by the enemy, and round which the battle was fiercest. Many corpses already strewed the ground at the entrance, and furious Amalekites were struggling with a party of Hebrews, while from within came wild screams of terror.

He sprang across the threshold with winged feet, and beheld a spectacle which filled even the unflinching man with horror, for on the left of the large room it formed, Hebrews and Amalekites were rolling on the bloodstained mats in a furious struggle, while on the right he saw Miriam and her waiting-women, whose hands the men of the desert had tied.

The men had meant to carry them off as precious plunder, but an Amalekite woman, frenzied with hatred, revenge and jealousy, and eager to sacrifice the strange women to the flames, was blowing the brands on the hearth and, by waving the veil she had snatched from Miriam's head, had fanned them to a considerable blaze.

A fearful tumult filled the confined space as Joshua rushed into the tent; on one side the yells of the struggling men, while on the other the Prophetess's women set up a succession of loud shrieks for rescue and deliverance as soon as they saw him coming. Their mistress, as pale as death, knelt at the feet of the Amalekite chief whose wife was threatening them with death by fire. She stared at their deliverer as though a spirit had started out of the earth before her eyes, and the scenes which followed stamped themselves on Miriam's memory as

a series of horrible and disconnected, but never-to-be forgotten images.

First the Amalekite chief who had bound her, was a strange but heroic figure. With his swarthy skin and high hooked nose he resembled an eagle of his native mountains; his beard was black, his eyes were flame. But ere long he was to measure his strength with another—with the man who once had been dear to her heart. She had often compared him with a lion, but never had he seemed more like the king of the desert.

They were both mighty men and strong. No one could have predicted which of them must yield to the other, which must win the victory; and it was her fate to witness the struggle, for already the fiery son of the desert had shouted his war-cry and rushed upon the more cautious Hebrew.

That no man may live if his heart stops beating for so much as a minute every child must know; and yet Miriam was certain that hers had stood still, rigid and turned to stone, when the Lion rushed into peril to destroy the Eagle, and the Amalekite's bright knife flashed forth, and she saw the blood flowing from her champion's shoulder.

But then her heart began to beat again, nay

and faster than ever before, for suddenly the lion-hearted warrior whom she had so lately hated with such bitter hatred was once more, as by a miracle, the friend of her childhood again. Love had waked up with the sound of trumpets and cymbals, and marched in triumph into her heart, lately so desolate and forlorn. All that had held them apart was suddenly forgotten and buried, and never were more pressing appeals addressed to the Most High than in the brief prayer which went up from her agonised soul. But as her pleading was fervent, so was it immediately answered, for the Eagle was down and his soaring ended for ever, under the superior strength of the Lion.

All was dark for a while before Miriam's eyes, and it was as in a dream that she felt the cords which bound her wrists and ankles cut by Ephraim. Then she soon recovered consciousness and beheld, at her feet, the bleeding corpse of the vanquished chief, and in other parts of the tent many bodies and wounded men, among them several of her husband's slaves. By them, stalwart and victorious, stood the brave fighting men of her nation, with the noble and reverend figure of Nun, and Joshua, whose wounds his father was binding up.

This task, she felt, should have been hers and

hers alone; and deep grief and burning shame came over her as she remembered how greatly she had sinned against this man. She knew not how she could repay him, on whom she had brought such deep sorrow, all she owed him. Her whole heart longed to hear some word of forgiveness from his lips, and she went towards him on her knees across the blood-stained ground; but the Prophetess's eloquent lips were dumb; she could not find the right word, till suddenly the imploring cry rose loud from her oppressed breast:

“Joshua, O Joshua! I have sinned against you indeed, and will repent of it all my life long, but do not scorn my thanks. Do not repel me from you,—and if you can, forgive me!”

She could not have uttered another word; but then—and this again she never forgot—her eyes had overflowed with scalding tears, and he had raised her from the ground with irresistible strength, and yet with a hand as gentle as a mother's when her child has had a fall, and from his lips came mild and friendly words, promising full forgiveness. The mere pressure of his hand was enough to show her that he was no longer wroth with her, as she heard his assurance that the name

of Joshua could not fall more sweetly on his ear from any lips than from hers.

Then, with the cry "Jehovah our Refuge!" he turned from her, but his clear shout, and the enthusiastic battle-cry of his followers rang in her ears long after.

At last all was still once more, and she only knew that never before nor after had she wept so passionately or so bitterly as in that hour. Moreover she had made two solemn vows to the God who had called her to be his handmaid. But the two men whom they most concerned, were meanwhile in the thick of the tumult of battle.

One had led his men back from the rescued camp to meet the foe once more; the other, by the side of the leader of the multitude, was watching the varying movements of the still furious fight.

Joshua found his followers hardly pressed. In one place they were giving way, in another they were making but a half-hearted stand against the sons of the desert; Hur too was looking with increasing and double anxiety on the course of the battle, for in the camp he pictured his wife and father in peril, and below him his son. His fatherly heart quaked when he beheld Uri giving way, but when he made a fresh onslaught, and by a well

directed attack broke the ranks of the enemy, he held up his head again, and longed to be able to shout a word of praise that he could hear. But what ear could be sharp enough to hear a single voice above the clatter of weapons and mingled battle cries, the shrieking of the women and the wailing of the wounded, the surly grunting of the camels, the blare of trumpets and horns?

And now the foremost of the Amalekites had forced their way, like the thin edge of a wedge, into the furthest ranks of the Hebrews. If they should succeed in breaking open a gap for those behind them, and effect a junction with those who had attacked the camp, the battle was lost and the fate of the Israelites was sealed; for still another horde of Amalekites were in reserve at the southern end of the valley, who had not yet had any fighting, and who seemed to be intended to protect the oasis from the foe in the last extremity.

But here was a fresh surprise.

The men of the desert had made their way so far forward, that the slingers and bow-men could scarcely hit one of them, and if these were not to remain idle they must be ordered down to the scene of the struggle.

Hur might have called in vain to Uri to remember

these men and give them some fresh occupation, but suddenly a youth made his appearance, coming from the end of the encampment, a lad as nimble as a mountain-goat, scrambling and leaping from crag to crag. As soon as he reached the first man he spoke to him, gave a signal to those beyond, who again repeated it to the next, and finally they all descended into the valley and climbed the western cliff, as far as a spot where some men were standing; there they vanished as utterly as though the rocks had swallowed them. The youth who had led the slingers and bowmen was Ephraim. A patch of shadow on the face of the rock, was, no doubt, the opening into a ravine, and through this the men were to be led whom Joshua had sent for to succour the camp. So thought Hur, and not he alone, but Aaron likewise; and again Hur began to doubt whether the Lord were indeed with Joshua, for the men who were to be of use at the tents were lost to the troops which it was now the duty of his son and of his comrade Nahshon to command.

The fight round the camp had already lasted above an hour, and Moses had not ceased to beseech the Lord with hands uplifted to Heaven, when the Amalekites made a great rush forward. At this the leader of his people collected all his strength

for a new appeal to the Almighty; but he was much exhausted, his knees shook, and his weary arms fell by his sides. Still his spirit had all its fire, and his heart all its fervent desire not to cease from entreating Him who is the Ruler of battles. The leader of his people must not be idle during the struggle, and his weapon was prayer. Like a child which will not cease from beseeching its mother till she has granted him that which it unselfishly demands for its brethren, so Moses importuned the Almighty who had hitherto shewn himself to be a Father to him and the Hebrew folk, saving them as by a miracle from the greatest perils.

But his frame was faint, so he called on his companions and they pushed forward a block of stone on which he might sit, while he besieged the Heart of the Lord with more and yet more prayers. There he sat; and when his weary limbs refused their service, his soul still answered to his call, and went up as in a flame to the Ruler of the destinies of man. But his arms grew more and more feeble, and dropped at last as if weighed down by heavy masses of lead, although it had for years been his habit to raise them heavenwards when he cried fervently to God on High.

This his comrades knew, and they thought they

had perceived that as often as their great chief's hands sank, the Sons of Amalek gained some new advantage. Then they diligently held up his arms, the one on the right hand, and the other on the left; and although the mighty man could no longer appeal to Heaven in intelligible words, and his giant's frame swayed to and fro, and more than once he felt as though the stone on which he sat, the valley below him, and the whole world were in movement, still his eyes and hands were raised on high. Not for an instant did he cease calling on the Most High, till, on a sudden, from the camp, there came up glad shouts of victory, which echoed loudly from the rocky walls of the gorge. Joshua had returned to the field of battle, and at the head of his troops rushed on the enemy with irresistible fury.

From this moment the struggle assumed a new aspect. The decision, indeed, was still doubtful. Moses, supported on either side, dared not cease to uplift his heart and his hands, but at last, at last, the final struggle was over. The ranks of the Amalekites gave way, and presently they fled, broken and panic-stricken, to the southern pass by which they had entered the valley. And even from thence the cry came up from a thousand throats, "Jehovah our Refuge!" "Victory! Victory!"

At this the man of God let his arms fall from the supporting shoulders of his companions, and stood up, tall and strong, crying with renewed and wonderfully revived energy: "I thank Thee, my God and Lord! Jehovah our Refuge! Thy people are saved!" But then his sight grew dark from exhaustion.

However, he presently looked up again, and saw Ephraim, pressing close on the Amalekites, who had taken their stand at the southern end with his slingers and bowmen, while Joshua drove the main body of the desert-tribes backwards towards their vanquished brethren.

The Captain had heard from a deserter, of a pass by which good climbers could reach a defile leading out on the southern end of the battle-field, and Ephraim, in obedience to his command, had led the archers and slingers along this difficult path, and fallen on the rear of the last band of the enemy who could still have made any stand. Thus attacked from both sides, their ranks thinned, and their courage quelled, the Sons of Amalek gave up the struggle; and now it was seen how these children of the desert and dwellers among the highlands could use their legs, for at a sign from their leader they first killed their dromedaries, and then fled in all directions

like feathers scattered by the wind. They climbed steep cliffs which looked inaccessible to man, like the nimblest lizards, on their hands and feet; but a great many escaped by the ravine which the deserter had betrayed to Joshua.

CHAPTER XI.

THE larger half of the Amalekites lay dead or wounded on the field of battle, and the Hebrew Captain knew that the other desert-tribes who had joined them had, as was their custom, abandoned their slain, and would retire to their own haunts. At the same time it was not impossible that despair might give the fugitives courage not to allow their oasis to fall into the hands of the Hebrews without a final contest.

However, Joshua's men were too much exhausted for it to be possible to lead them any further at this moment. He himself had lost some blood from several slight wounds, and the great exertions of the last few days had made their mark even on his iron frame.

Besides this, the sun, which had not long risen when the strife began, was already sinking to rest, and if they were to force their way through to the oasis it would not be advisable to do battle in the

dark. What he and, even more, his brave followers, most needed was rest till the next day's dawn.

All about him he saw none but glad faces, beaming with proud self-reliance, and when he dismissed the ranks to retire to the camp and rejoice with those dear to them over the victory, the troops, which had marched past wearily and slowly, broke out in shouts of joy, as clear and glad as though they had quite forgotten the fatigues which had bowed their heads and weighted their feet.

"Hail to Joshua! Hail to the Conqueror!" re-echoed from cliff to cliff, long after the last of the troops was lost to sight. But more clearly still did the words ring in his heart in which Moses had thanked him, for they had been:—"Verily as the Sword of the Most High, steadfast and strong, hast thou fought the fight. So long as the Lord is thy Helper, and Jehovah our Refuge we need fear no enemies!"

He fancied he still could feel on his brow and head the kiss of the great leader, the Man of God, who had clasped him to his heart before all the people; and it was not a small thing to control the violent agitation which disturbed him at the end of this all-important day.

A strong desire to stand clear in his own eyes,

before mingling with the jubilant throng, or meeting his father, to whom a share in every great emotion that stirred his soul was due, prompted him to linger on the field of battle. This was now a scene where gloom and horror held sway, for those who lingered here besides himself were detained by death or mortal wounds.

The ravens which had followed the pilgrims were soaring above the bodies, and already venturing to settle on the rich banquet spread before them. The scent of blood had brought the beasts of prey out of their coverts in the hills and rocks, and their greedy howl or bark was to be heard on every side.

Then when darkness followed on dusk, lights began to flit about over the blood-drenched ground. They guided the slaves and those who missed one dear to them, to discriminate between friend and foe, the wounded and the dead; and many a cry of anguish from those who were badly hurt rose up amid the croaking of the birds of prey and the yells of the ravening jackals and hyaenas, foxes and tiger-cats.

But Joshua knew the horrors of a battle-field and feared them not. Leaning against a rock he saw the same stars rise as had shone on him outside his tent in the camp by Tanis, when he stood divided

against himself, face to face with the hardest decision in his life. Since then a month only had gone by, but that short space of time had witnessed an incredible change in his whole inner and outer life. All that had seemed great and splendid to him that night, as he sat outside the tent in which Ephraim lay in his fever, all that he had then deemed worthy of his most strenuous effort, now lay far behind him, vain and worthless. He cared no longer for the honours and dignities with which the caprice of the weak and arbitrary King of a strange nation could make him great and rich. What, to him, now, was the well armed and disciplined army among whose Captains he had numbered himself with such glad pride?

He could scarcely believe that there had been a time when he had aspired to nothing higher than to command more and yet more thousands of Egyptian soldiers, when his heart had beat high at the prospect of a new title or a mark of honour conferred by men whom, for the most part, he could not regard as worthy of his esteem. He had looked for everything from the Egyptians, for nothing from his own nation. That night in the camp he had thought with repulsion of the great mass of the people, who were of his own blood, as miserable

slaves, perishing in degrading servitude. He had looked down in his pride even on the noblest of them, for they were but herdsmen, and as such held in contempt by the Egyptians whose feelings he shared.

His own father, indeed, was an owner of beasts, and though he held him in high veneration, this was in spite of his position, this was because his whole nature commanded respect, because the vigorous old man with his youthful fire won the love of all men and above all, that of his grateful son. He had never ceased to acknowledge him gladly, but in all other matters he had striven so to conduct himself among his brethren-in-arms that they should forget his origin and regard him in all respects as one of themselves. His ancestress, Asenath, the wife of Joseph, had been an Egyptian, and of this he had always been proud.

But now—to-night.

Now he would have made the man who called him an Egyptian feel his wrath; and all which, at the last new moon, he would have cast from him and hidden away as though it were a disgrace, at this next new moon, which like the last, rose in a star-lit sky, made him hold his head high with pride and joy.

How grand a thought it was that he had a right to pride himself on being what he was! What a standing lie, what infinite treason, would his life and doings as an Egyptian Captain appear to him now! His upright spirit rejoiced in the consciousness that this was an end to that unworthy denial and concealment of his own blood. He felt with glad thankfulness that he was one of the people whom the Most High had chosen before all others; that he belonged to a congregation of whom even the humblest, nay, and every child, lifted up his hands in prayer to the God whom the loftiest spirits among the Egyptians veiled in the narrowest mystery, because they thought the common folk too weak and too dull-witted to stand before his might and greatness, or to comprehend them.

And this, the One and Only God, before whom the motley crowd of Egyptian gods sank into nothingness, this God had chosen him, the son of Nun, out of the thousands of the nation, to be the leader and protector of His chosen people, and had given him a name pledging Himself to be his Helper. To obey his God and to devote his blood and life, under His guidance, to his people seemed to him as lofty an aim as any man ever kept in view. His black eyes flashed more brightly as he thought of

it. His heart seemed too small for all the love with which he would now make up to his brethren for his shortcomings towards them in former years.

He had indeed lost a noble and lordly woman whom he had hoped to win, and she was the wife of another; but this did not at all trouble the happy enthusiasm which possessed his soul; he had ceased to desire her for his own, high as her image still stood in his heart. At this moment he thought of her with calm gratitude; for as he confessed to himself, his new life had begun on that decisive night when Miriam had set him the example of sacrificing everything, even what she held dearest, for God and the Hebrew people.

In so far as the prophetess had sinned against him he had blotted it all from his memory, for he was wont to forget when he had forgiven. At this moment he felt only how much he owed her. Like some noble tree uplifting its head to heaven where two hostile countries join and touch, so she stood between his former and his present life; and although love was laid in the grave, still he and she could never cease to strive hand in hand for the same end, and to walk in the same way.

He looked back once more on the period which he had just passed through, and he could say to

himself that in a very short time, and under his leadership, a crowd of wretched serfs had become valiant warriors. They had already learned to obey promptly in the field and to be justly proud of victory. And every new success must inspire them. To-day, even, it seemed to him not merely desirable, but perfectly possible, at their head to conquer a new country, a home which they would love and call their own, where they might dwell in freedom and welfare, and become such men of valour as by good training, he hoped to make them.

Thus among the horrors of the battle-field under the moonless night, gladness as the radiance of day shone in his soul, and with the words "God and my people," and a thankful upward glance at the starry vault, he quitted the corpse-strewn valley of death with a triumphant step, as though he were marching over palms and flowers cast in his victorious path by a thankful throng.

CONCLUSION.

IN the camp he found all astir. Fires were blazing in front of the tents, and round them sat joyful groups, while many a beast was slain, either as a thank-offering or for an evening feast. Wherever Joshua went he was hailed with glad acclamations; but he failed to find his father, for Nun had accepted Hur's bidding, and it was outside his tent that the son embraced the old man, radiant with thankful pride. And the belated guest was welcomed by Miriam and her husband in a way which gladdened his heart. Hur gave him his hand with hearty frankness, while she bowed reverently before him, and her eyes beamed with joy and gratitude.

Before he sat down Hur led him aside, ordered a slave who had just slaughtered a calf to divide it in two parts, and pointing to it said:

"You have done great things for the people and for me, son of Nun, and my life is too short for

the gratitude you have laid on me and on my wife. If you can forget the bitter words which troubled our peace at Dophkah—and you say you have forgotten them—let us henceforth dwell in unity as brothers in one cause, and stand up for each other in joy and sorrow, in peril and in need. The Captaincy henceforth belongs to you alone, Joshua, and to none other; and the people all rejoice thereat, and most of all so do I and my wife. And if you share my desire that we should henceforth live in the bonds of brotherhood, come with me, and after the custom of our fathers we will walk together between the two halves of this slaughtered beast.”

And Joshua gladly did his bidding; Miriam was the first to join in the loud approval which old Nun began, and she did so with ardent vehemence; for it was she who, after humbling herself before her husband, whose love she had now quite won back, had suggested to him to invite Joshua to this treaty of brotherhood which was now ratified. All this had cost her no pang; for the two vows to which she had pledged herself, after the son of Nun, whom she now was ready to call Joshua, had saved her from the hand of the foe, were about to be fulfilled, and she felt that it was in a happy hour that she had made them,

The feeling, new to her, that she was a woman even as other women are, gave to her whole person a gentleness which had hitherto been foreign to her, and this won her the love of her husband, whose full worth she had learnt during the bitter time when he had opened his heart to her.

At the very hour when Hur and Joshua were sealing the bond of brotherhood, another faithful pair had met again whom sacred duty had torn asunder, for, while the friends were still enjoying their meal in front of Hur's tent, three persons desired permission to speak with Nun, their lord and master. These were the old freed woman who had remained behind in Tanis with her grand-daughter and Asser, from whom Hogleh had parted to stay with her feeble grand parents.

Old Eliab, the father, had soon died, and then the widow and her grand-daughter had set forth and followed their people through unspeakable fatigues, the old woman riding her husband's ass. Nun received the faithful souls with joy, and in the same hour gave Hogleh to Asser to wife. Thus this blood-stained day had brought blessing to many; and yet it was fated to end with a harsh discord.

So long as the fires blazed in the camp there was always some stir going forward, and throughout

their wanderings hither no evening had passed without some quarrel and bloody fray. Wounds and death blows had been the frequent result, when one who had been insulted revenged himself on his adversary, when some dishonest rascal had seized the property of another, or refused to fulfil the obligations he had contracted.

In these cases it had often been a hard matter to make the peace and bring the criminals to a reckoning, for the refractory refused to acknowledge any man, be he who he might, as a judge over them. Those who had fancied themselves injured, banded together with others, and tried to right themselves by force.

On this festive evening, Hur and his guests at first heard only such a noise as every one was accustomed to hear. But presently, when besides the wild uproar, a glare of light flared up close to them, the chiefs began to fear for the safety of the camp; so they rose up to put an end to the turmoil, and found themselves in the presence of a spectacle which filled some with rage and horror, and others with grief.

The triumph of victory had turned the heads of the multitude. They felt prompted to give expression to their gratitude to God, and with a vivid

remembrance of the horrible worship of their native land, a party of Phœnicians, among the strangers in the camp, had lighted a great fire to their god Moloch, and were almost in the act of flinging an Amalekite into the flames as an offering pleasing in his eyes. Close at hand, the Israelites had set up a clay image of the Egyptian god Set, which one of his Hebrew devotees had brought with him as a charm to protect his family, placing it on a tall pillar of wood. Hundreds were dancing round it, and singing in triumph. Their worship could not have been more fervent, nor the rapture of their souls more eager, if they had desired to pay the God of their fathers the thanksgiving which was His due.

Soon after his return to the camp, Aaron had assembled the people to sing praises and glorify the Lord; but the need for seeing an image of the god to which they might uplift their souls, after the manner to which they had so long been accustomed, had proved so strong in many of them that the mere sight of the clay idol had sufficed to bring them to their knees, and turn their hearts from the true God.

At the sight of the worshippers of Moloch, who had already bound their victim ready to cast him

into the flames, Joshua was very wroth; and when in their darkness they refused to hear him he bid the trumpets sound, and by the help of the young fighting-men, who obeyed him blindly, and to whom the strangers were anything rather than dear, he drove them without bloodshed back to their own quarters of the camp.

The Hebrews yielded to the urgent exhortations of old Nun, Hur and Nahshon, and repented of their sin, which was aggravated by ingratitude. But even they took it amiss when the fiery old man broke the images they prized so dearly, and if it had not been for the love they bore his son and grandson, and for the honour due to his white hairs, many a hand would have been lifted against him.

Moses had retired into solitude, as was his wont after such peril had by the grace of the Almighty come to a good issue; and the tears rose to Miriam's eyes when she thought of the grief it must cause her noble brother to hear the tidings of such a falling away and such deep unthankfulness. A dark shadow had fallen even on Joshua's glad and confident mood. He lay sleepless on a mat in his father's tent, looking back on the past. His warrior's soul was strengthened by the thought that a single Almighty and unerring Power ruled the universe and

the lives of men, and required unfailing obedience from all created things; a single glance at the order of nature and of life showed him that all things depended on one infinitely great and mighty Being, and rose up, moved, or lay down to rest at a sign from Him.

To him, the Captain of a puny army, his God was the supreme and wise Captain, the only Leader who was always sure of victory. How great was the sin of insulting such a Lord, and of going after strange gods in return for His mercies. And this was what the Israelites had done before his very eyes; and as he recalled to his memory the doings which had compelled his intervention, the question arose in his mind how might they be protected against the wrath of the most High, and how could the eyes of the darkened multitude be opened to His wondrous and soul-inspiring greatness?

But he found no answer and saw no remedy, as he pictured to himself the perversity prevailing in the camp, and the rebellious spirit which threatened to bring evil on his people.

He had succeeded in reducing the fighting-men to obedience. As soon as the trumpet sounded and he made his appearance in battle array at the head

of his troops their stiff-necked will gave way to his. Was there nothing, then, which in the peaceful round of every-day life could keep them within the bounds which, under Egyptian rule, made life safe for even the humblest and weakest, and protected them against the high-handed and powerful? Meditating on these things, he watched till dawn was near, and as the stars began to set he sprang up and bid the trumpets sound, and to-day as yesterday, the men assembled without a murmur, and in full numbers. He was soon marching at the head of his troops through the narrow gorge, and after they had gone forward for about an hour in silence and in darkness, they were refreshed by the cooler air which precedes the day. Dawn began to spread in the East, the sky grew paler, and the glowing splendours of sunrise solemnly and grandly rose above the majestic mass of the Holy Mountain. It lay spread out before the pilgrims almost tangibly close and clear, with its brown crags, precipices and ravines; towering above them rose its snow-peaked crown, round which a pair of eagles were soaring, their broad wings bathed in a golden glory in the light of the new-born day.

And again, as at Alush, a pious thrill brought the marching host to a stand-still, while each one,

from the first to the last, raised his hands in silent adoration and prayer.

Then the warriors went on with hearts uplifted, one gaily calling to another in glad excitement as some pretty little brown birds flew to meet them, twittering loudly—an assurance that fresh water must be near. Hardly an hour further on they saw the blue-green foliage of a tamarisk-brake, and above it tall palms, and heard at last the sweetest sound that ever falls on the listening ear in the desert—the ripple of a running stream. This encouraged them greatly, and the mighty form of the peak of Sinai,* its heaven-kissed head veiled in blue mist, filled the souls of these men, dwellers until now in the level meads of Goshen, with devout amazement.

They now proceeded with caution, for the remnant of the stricken Amalekites might be lurking in ambush. But there was no foe to be seen or heard; and the only traces the Hebrews found

* Now called Serbal; not the Sinai of the monks, which, in my opinion, was not supposed to be the mountain of the Law-giving, till the time of Justinian. A full exposition of the view that Serbal is the Sinai of Scripture, which was first put forward by Lepsius and in which other writers agree, may be found in a volume entitled (in German) "Through Goshen to Sinai," by Dr. G. Ebers. Leipzig 1882. Wilh. Engelmann.

of the sons of the desert and their thirst for revenge were their ruined houses, the fine palms felled and prone, and the garden-ground destroyed.

They were forced to clear the slender trunks out of their path that they might not check the advance of the Hebrew multitude; and when this task was done Joshua went down through a defile leading to the brook in the valley, and up the nearest shoulder of the mountain, to look about him, far and near, for the enemy.

The mountain-path led over masses of granite veined with green diorite, rising steeply till it ended high above the plain of the oasis, at a plateau, where, by a clear spring, green shrubs and delicate mountain-flowers graced the wilderness.

Here he paused to rest, and looking round he discerned in the shadow of an overhanging rock a tall figure gazing at the ground.

It was Moses.

The course of his reflections had so completely rapt him from his present surroundings that he did not perceive Joshua's approach, and the warrior reverently kept silence for fear of disturbing the Man of God, waiting patiently till he raised his bearded face, and greeted him with dignity and

kindness. Side by side they gazed down into the oasis and the desolate rocky ravines at their feet. Even a tiny strip of the Red Sea, which bathes the western foot of the mountain, gleamed like an emerald in the distance. And their talk was of the people, and of the greatness and power of the God who had brought them so far with such wondrous works; and as they looked to the northward they could see the endless train of the pilgrims, slowly making their way along the devious line of the defile towards the oasis.

Then did Joshua open his heart to the Man of God, and told him all he had thought and wondered during the past sleepless night, finding no answer.

The prophet listened to him with composure, and then replied in a deep hesitating voice and in broken sentences:

“Insubordination in the camp—yes; it is ruining the people. But the Lord of Might has left it in these hands to dash them to pieces. Woe to those who rebel. That Power, as stupendous as this mountain, and as immovable as its foundation rock—they must feel it!”

Here the angry speech of Moses ceased. After

they had stood for a while looking into the distance, Joshua broke the silence by enquiring:

“And what is that Power called?”

And the answer came clear and strong from the bearded lips of the Man of God:

“The Law.” And he pointed with his staff to the top of the peak.

Then with a gesture of farewell he quitted his companion.

Joshua, still looking out, perceived some dark shadows moving to and fro in the yellow sand of the valleys. These were the remnant of the Amalekites seeking a new spot where they might dwell.

For a short time he kept his eye on them and when he had assured himself that they were moving away from the oasis, he returned pensive to the valley.

“The Law” he repeated to himself again and again.

Yes, that was what the exiles lacked. Its severity might be the one thing capable of forming the tribes which had fled from bondage into a nation worthy of the God who had chosen them before all the other peoples of the earth.

Here the Captain's reflections were broken off, for the voices of men, the bellowing and bleating of herds and flocks, the barking of dogs and the noise of hammers came up to him from the oasis. The tents were being pitched—a work of peace in which his aid was not needed. He lay down in the shade of a thick tamarisk-shrub, above which a tall palm towered proudly, and thankfully stretched his limbs in the consciousness that henceforth the people would be amply cared for, in war by his good sword, in peace by the Law. This was much, this raised his hopes;—but no—this could not be all, could not be the end of everything. The longer he meditated, the more deeply he felt that this did not satisfy him for the mass of beings down there, whom he bore in his heart as his brethren and sisters.

His broad brow darkened again, and startled out of his rest by these new doubts, he sadly shook his head. No, and again no! The Law could not afford the people who had grown so dear to him all he desired for them. Something else was needful to make their future lot as noble and fair as he had dreamed it might be, on his way to the mines.

But what was that something, what was its name?

And now he began to rack his brain to find out; but while, with closed eyes, he allowed his thoughts to wander to those other nations whom he had seen in war and in peace, to discover what was the one thing still lacking to the Hebrew folk, sleep fell on him; and in a dream he saw Miriam and another lovelier form, resembling Kasana as he had often seen her flying to meet him, a pure and innocent child, and after her ran the white lamb which his father had given his favourite years since.

The two figures each offered him a gift, and bid him choose one or the other. In Miriam's hands was a heavy gold plate, and on the top of it in letters of flame he saw written, "The Law." She held it forth to him with gloomy gravity. The child offered him a drooping palm leaf, such as he had often carried in token of truce.

The sight of the table of the Law filled him with pious awe; but the palm branch waved invitingly in his eyes, and he seized it quickly. Hardly had he grasped it when the figure of the Prophetess vanished into the air like a mist wafted away by the morning breeze. He gazed in anxious surprise at the spot where she had stood, amazed and uneasy at the strange choice he had made, though feeling he had decided rightly.

Then he asked the child what her gift might signify to him and the people. At this she signed to him pointing to the distance, and spoke three words, in a gentle sweet voice which went to his heart. But strive as he might to seize their meaning he could not succeed, and when he desired the vision to interpret them he awoke at the sound of his own voice, and made his way back to the camp, disappointed and puzzled.

In later days he often sought again to remember these words, but always in vain.

The whole force of his body and soul he devoted to the Hebrew folk; but his nephew Ephraim, as a powerful prince of his tribe, well worthy of the honour he achieved, founded a house in Israel. Through him old Nun saw great-grandchildren growing up, who promised enduring posterity to his noble race.

The rest of Joshua's active life, and how he conquered a new home for his people is a well known tale.

And there, in the Land of Promise, many hundred years later, was another Joshua born, who brought to all mankind gifts which the son of Nun vainly

sought for the children of Israel. And the three words spoken by the child, and which the Captain of the host failed to interpret, were "Love, Mercy and Redemption!"

THE END.

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